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THE STEERING WHEEL

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THE STEERING WHEEL

By
ROBERT ALEXANDER WASON

Illustrated by

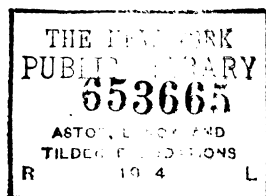
PAUL J. MEYLAN

*All the world's a car, and all the men and
women would-be chauffeurs*

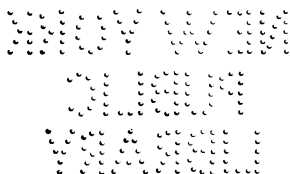
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Private affairs, important enough in themselves, are merely the cogs and valves of some large car of destiny. As this car tears along the difficult road of circumstance, much depends on the hands that hold the steering wheel. It is the struggle for the control of this wheel which goes to make up the larger dramas of life.

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THE STEERING WHEEL

THE STEERING WHEEL

CHAPTER I

DICK ARRIVES

BANNINGTON PARK, comprising fifteen acres, is situated in the second rise of the Jersey Hills. Landscape artists had not been called on to add to its natural beauty to any great extent, and the ancient trees had fought their own way into an exalted station, where they reigned in dignified complacency.

In front of the large square brick house, the lawn was well kept, and the box hedge which surrounded the entire place was luxuriant and fairly well trimmed, but there were few flowers and these were of the sturdier and simpler kinds. Other country homes were clustered along the well-kept road, or, rather, street, which continued into Minster, and the entire neighborhood suggested discriminating content and comfortable independence.

Richard Bannington was a name of national familiarity, and yet the man himself was known to but very few. He had been written up and he had been written down; but there was nothing to indicate that all this very skilful writing had given him a moment's irrita-

tion or modified to the slightest degree a single one of his actions.

On this July morning, he was pacing up and down the library and, as was his custom, talking to himself in a low and somewhat grumbling tone. "I'll be glad to see the young scamp again," he said, as he paused at a window overlooking the driveway. "Come to think of it, I haven't seen much of him since he went to college. Haven't quite lost track of him, though. If the young cub can only earn money one-half as easily as he spends it, he'll be a big help to me— Well, what do you want?"—to a tall, dry-looking footman in dingy green livery, who had just entered. All the male servants at Bannington were tall and had the appearance of having been seasoned in a dry-kiln, and of having been kept in just a shade too long.

"If you please, sir," answered the footman, "the carriage broke down."

"Broke down? On such a morning as this! Don't you know enough to see that things are in good order when you know that they are going to be needed?"

"The coachman told you over a month ago, sir—" began the footman, but was interrupted by a hasty wave of the hand.

"Never mind—it'll be all the better," said Mr. Bannington, pursing up his thin lips. "It will give me a chance to see what kind of rig he hires to drive out in. Tell the coachman to have the carriage put in good order and next time not to bother me with such details."

The footman bowed and withdrew, and Richard

continued to talk to himself: "I hope he's not like most of these college fellows. But that trip around the world should have put a finish on him. Hope it has. I could never stand it if he was one of these strolling clothes-forms. Not much fear of that, though. Probably has the same cool, calculating, practical head his father had. By gad, I do hope he has ideas, and is ready to pitch in and help me fight Burton. I hate to tell him how hard put to it the old Bannington Plant is."

His brows were drawn down in a fierce scowl and a weary droop came to his mouth for a moment; but he shook it off with a toss of his head and with a dry, throaty chuckle, continued: "I wonder if he will stand driving as well as I did. His father was only two years older than I, but land, how he did goad me through a stint of work. I'll not be too hard on the boy, but I'll not stand much nonsense, either. I can't see why it should take four times as long to change from a boy to a man nowadays as it did fifty years ago. He'll have to make a quick job of it. I need him and he has to make good. The trouble is that these rich men's sons are pampered and fussed over until— Well, what is it?"—to the butler who had entered noiselessly and was standing in a respectful posture.

"Shall I give orders, sir, to have Mr. Dick's bath drawn as soon as he comes into-sight?" inquired Higgins.

"Now, see here, Higgins," replied Richard Bannington severely, "Mr. Dick is twenty-four years old, and if he hasn't sense enough to tell when he needs a bath and how to get one when he does need it, why

I'll get a governess for him; but I want you to treat him as though he were a full-grown man—a full-grown man. Understand?"

Higgins bowed apologetically: "I only thought, sir, that bein' as 'ow Mr. Dick 'ad been away for so long—around the world and over in China and Africa and India and—"

"That will do," interrupted Bannington. "I am not interested in hearing the unabridged directory of the earth."

"And you don't think, then, that I need to 'ave 'is bath drawn, sir?" persisted Higgins.

"Hang it, no!" exclaimed Mr. Dick's uncle. "He has probably stopped long enough along the route to take a bath. If not, they'll give him one in quarantine. Now clear out! Wait, come back here. When he does come, I want all the servants drawn up at the steps to receive him. He is bringing some titled foreigners back with him, and I want to show them that we can do the thing right, if we want to—though it's all idiotic nonsense. I don't want you to show that it is idiotic nonsense, though; I want you to do things in some style. That's all."

It was plainly evident from his actions, that Mr. Bannington was a man who had little patience with nervous people. He was himself nervous this morning and it was easy to see that he was also disgusted with himself. He picked up the morning paper, glanced at it, threw it down, looked at his watch, saw that less than a quarter of an hour had elapsed since he had last looked at it, and made a motion as if also to throw the

watch down ; but changed his mind and strolled over to the window instead.

"I wish that boy would come!" he muttered. "It seems to me as if I have been waiting for him ever since the day I sent him off to boarding-school. I don't see how I could think any more of him if he really were my own son. If that boy disappoints me, I'll—well it's pretty hard to say just what I would do. It's two years now since I've seen him. Two years can make a terrible change. I don't like this nobility business. I don't want the boy to be a snob. That is always the trouble with the second generation : the first generation does the hustling, corners up a bunch of money, and the second generation gets a college education, a smattering of culture, a jumbled collection of fads and fashions, and then they want to become idle aristocrats. None of that for Dick—he comes from a working stock, and he has his own work to do. I swear, I'd sooner lose everything and see him start out at the bottom than to have him get the notion that he's something better than common people. Not much danger of that, though ; this is the common man's country and Dick will fit into it all right."

Mr. Bannington looked at the pictures on the walls, read over the titles on the books, and demonstrated the other symptoms of a busy man being forced to wait. Finally he walked into the hall and met the maid with a huge bouquet in her hands. The maid was not of the same order as the male servants. She was fresh and attractive, and had the appearance of one who found the world quite amusing and much to her liking.

"What are you going to do with those flowers?" asked Mr. Bannington.

"I am going to put them in Mr. Dick's room, sir," she answered.

"Stuff and nonsense!" he exclaimed. "Now, I want his room kept clean and comfortable, but he's not a school-girl, and I don't want any foolish frills. Put 'em in the dining-room."

The maid gave her head a toss as she turned to carry out this order, and her master strolled awkwardly up and down the hall for a few minutes. When he returned to the library, he noticed his entire domestic staff gathered at the foot of the front steps, and his face lighted in anticipation.

"He must have been sighted!" he exclaimed. "Hang it, I'll wager they don't look like real servants—too human—a grin on every face. What's the difference? It will be a good thing to let his foreign friends see right at the start that in this country we pay more attention to the realities than we do to the trimmings. He picked out the hack—fifty cents apiece—that's a good sign!

"By George, the boy has filled out! He looks like a man; but what is he doing? He's shaking hands with the coachman, he's shaking hands with the cook! Good Lord! I thought he was going to kiss the maid. Now he's shaking hands with old Nixon, the gardener; and hanged if he isn't introducing his quality friends! Queer looking quality, too."

The old man raised the window and in a voice which shook a little from excitement, called, "Here, Dick;

stop that confounded nonsense and come in and speak to me.

"It looks to me as if he had joined a show," he grumbled as he turned to the door to meet his nephew. "From the very day that child came into the world, he has been a constant surprise to me!"

The next moment Dick, his brown face shining with health and the joy of a long deferred home-coming, burst into the room, seized his uncle's hand and shook it vigorously, backed off a few steps, surveyed him critically, pounced on the hand once more and after another vigorous shaking, exclaimed: "By Jing, Uncle, you are in corking form! I never saw you looking better. Maybe a pound or so too fine, but this is hot weather and there is no use lugging around a lot of surplus fat."

The elder man's face had broken into involuntary smiles at the boy's breeziness; but the twinkling welcome in his eyes shone through an unsuspected mist. He had staked a good part of himself on the task of bringing this boy through to manhood, and it affected him more than he cared to show, when he looked into the clear, steady, brown eyes and noted the open courage with which they returned his glance.

"I'm mighty glad you're back, Dick," he said gravely. "You're looking well. Are you ready to pitch in and work?"

"Play that bet open, Uncle, and you'll win a fortune," answered Dick enthusiastically. "I am strong for the life of toil, and I want to begin right away."

"That's right! By George, Dick, you've taken a load

off my mind. I was afraid you might come back with a lot of nonsense in your head." Bannington smiled benignly and a trifle apologetically.

"Never fear," replied Dick seriously. "I have had my fling, and now that I have found my life-work, I want to begin on it without a moment's waste. But let me present my friends. This is Claude Lorrain; he is a count of one of the most ancient French families, but has cast aside his title and entire patrimony in order to devote himself to his fellow-men."

Lorrain bowed gracefully and held out a white slender hand as he said, with a very slight accent, "I am rejoiced to meet the uncle of my best friend. I have heard so much of monsieur's good qualities that already he seems like an old friend, also."

Mr. Bannington's brows had drawn together as he scrutinized Lorrain critically. "I am always glad to meet one of Dick's friends," he said in a voice which held a faint trace of reserve, "but a little later I want to learn more of this casting aside business. Doesn't sound practical to me."

"And this is Emil Birkhead, Uncle," continued Dick. "You'll be sure to like him. He talks like a double-entry ledger."

It was evident that the stolid German found more favor and there was no reservation in the hearty handshake he received. "You don't look to me like a man who has given away his birthright," said Bannington dryly.

"It is impossible for a man his birthright to give away," replied the German as though from a platform.

"My birthright entitles me to a little less than one billionth of the earth's yearly production of wealth. Grab I more, I become a robber, accept I less, I am a fool. That is, I am a fool unless I—"

"And this is Ivan Michaelowski, Uncle," interrupted Dick. "Here is a genuine Russian peasant who speaks and writes seven languages, and is one of the keenest reasoners you ever met. You'll like him, I know."

The Russian was a tall lean man with straight black hair worn rather long. His expression was tense in its gravity and his deep eyes burned with the fire of a consuming purpose, and yet a twinkle of amusement flashed in Richard Bannington's eyes as he offered his hand. "I am glad to meet you," he said, and the Russian merely bowed.

"And now, Higgins," said Dick to the butler, "show my friends to their rooms at once."

Higgins led the way into the hall and up the stairs, holding his small head very high and oozing superciliousness at every pore. The elder Bannington followed them with his eyes until they disappeared, and then he asked gravely, "Is this the entire troupe, Dick, or will the balance arrive shortly?"

Dick laughed good humoredly. "This is the entire troupe, Uncle, and I'm not surprised that they strike you as being a little peculiar. They are out of the ordinary. They are men of remarkable attainment. I have spent the entire last year with them and I consider it my post-graduate course and of more importance than my entire university education."

"Who footed the bills, Dick?" asked his uncle.

"Well, I looked upon them as special instructors, you know; so I felt it my duty to settle most of the bills."

"Didn't have to fight much to have your own way, did you?"

"At first they objected, but I finally talked them around," answered Dick, staunchly striving to avoid the appearance of making an apology, which he felt was in no measure due.

For a moment Richard Bannington maintained his expression of mild interest and then his shrewd face relaxed into an amused smile. "You must be a most convincing talker, Dick, a most convincing talker. I have been honoring your checks, you know."

CHAPTER II

UNCLE RICHARD TAKES NOTICE

DICK BANNINGTON was loyal: a surprisingly large number of other words might be used to describe other phases of his versatile personality, but the mainspring of most of his actions was loyalty. Many of his private problems came from clashes between old loyalties and new; but as Dick was still filled with the boyish delight in the limitless variety which smiled on him from every side, he seldom went to the bottom of things and so was scarcely conscious of the power which his own active fidelity held over him. He was an enthusiastic believer in free-will and would have vehemently resented the theory that he was not ruled by cold, calculating reason, instead of having his every action biased by his own deep-seated loyalty.

Dick felt things keenly and quickly, and as he caught the sarcasm in his uncle's voice his loyalty to his new friends impelled him to their instant defense, while his more seasoned loyalty to his uncle restrained him from taking sides against him. Dick found a distressing number of rocks and whirlpools in his navigation of the sea of life.

"I think, taking everything into consideration, that the expenses of my tour of the world were extremely moderate," he said slowly and with much dignity.

An amused smile played behind the keen features of his uncle, without quite making its appearance on the surface. "Yes," he responded gravely, "taking everything into consideration, your expenses were moderate; but I am rather of the opinion that there are three things which I wish you had not taken into consideration. But that's all right, Dick. You've had your education and your trip. Now, then, when will you be ready to start to work?"

"I have already started to work; for, in sober truth, Uncle, this last year has been spent in preparing for and planning my life-work."

"I'm glad to see you in earnest, Dick; but I'm always a bit suspicious of that 'life-work' talk, and you've used it several times already. As a general rule, when any one is about to launch on some sort of freakish adventure, he calls it a 'life-work.' I'd a little sooner you hitched the words other end to. Your work-life is about to begin and I hope you are good and ready for it. When will you be ready, Dick, to start your education in the Bannington Steel Plant?"

The loyalty which Dick felt called on to feel for the steel plant was now presenting its side of the case, and his eyes fell to the carpet, which he appeared to study thoroughly. "I haven't thought of this for years," he answered slowly. "To tell you the truth, Uncle, I don't like the steel business."

"You don't, huh?" exclaimed that gentleman sharply. "Well, it has done a heap for you, and now it is up to you to do something for it. What do you think life is? One continuous vacation? You have been per-

fectly aware all your life that at twenty-five you were to take your place in the plant, and since your father's death, both your place and his. Think of your opportunities, Dick. You will have the controlling interest. You will outweigh me. You— Well, what in thunder did you expect to do?"

"Oh, in a vague sort of way, I was resigned to going into the plant, up to the last year or so," replied Dick, as though confessing a fault, "but now it seems a sordid sort of existence. I want to devote myself to a broader field. I want work which will call forth every atom of my energy—physical, mental and moral."

An expression of surprise, bordering on disgust, crossed the uncle's face. "Great Scott, boy! This is exactly what the plant offers. It doesn't stop at offering; it demands it." He paused, fumbled with a newspaper for a moment, and then resumed in a conciliatory tone: "Have you ever heard of the National Steel Mills, Dick?"

"Of course I have heard the name," answered Dick.

"It's just another name for William Burton—just another name for William Burton; and it's becoming devilish stiff competition, Dick, devilish stiff competition. Hang it! you seem to think that running a business like this is something like riding on a merry-go-round. Energy? You won't be troubled much to find a place for all you have."

"Yes," granted Dick complaisantly, "but after all it is the mere selfish piling-up of a private fortune."

"Is that all!" shouted Bannington. "Well, just you

step into the harness and I'll be tickled to death to sit down and watch the piling-up process for a while. It's been a heap more than that with me. You make me nervous—you positively irritate me! And to think that I have been counting the hours until your return. Dick, I could—but then I shan't hurry you. Look about you for a week or ten days, and by that time perhaps you will be ready to talk sense. But I've wasted too much time already this morning, and I'm going down to the office at once. We have dinner at six o'clock."

He paused at the door as though he would say something further, and then hurried across the hall and out the side entrance.

Dick gazed after him in mild surprise for a moment and then shook his head as he took a cigarette from his case and lighted it with mechanical preoccupation. "Poor old uncle!" he murmured. "What a rut a man gets into when he devotes himself to a narrow purpose! Well, I shall not be impatient. I shall explain to him step by step until he is able to get the true proportions and see life just as it is."

He turned to the window and looked reflectively on the lawn as he smoked his cigarette philosophically. Very much is indicated by the manner in which a cigarette is smoked. Dick seemed to justify the habit through his manner of appearing to use cigarettes merely for the inspiration he was able to draw from them. His reverie was interrupted by the entrance of the butler, and turning, he found Higgins smiling happily.

"We are all glad to see you back, Mr. 'Dick,'" said the butler bowing. "Is there anything I can do for you, sir?"

Dick surveyed him critically for a moment. "Higgins," he asked with easy familiarity, "what do you do in the way of reading?"

In earlier life Higgins had held very exalted ideas on formal decorum and the Bannington menage had never responded to his ideals; but it is most probable that no question had ever startled him more than this one. "Reading, sir?" he repeated in a dazed voice. "Why, I don't do very much reading, Mr. Dick. Parts of the evening paper always, and now and then a good love novel—a genteel one, of course, dealing with the affairs of real quality, sir."

"Real quality!" echoed Dick scornfully. "See here, Higgins, don't you know that it is personality that counts? Position is a mere accident. All men of equal capacity are equal, and it is barbarous to have arbitrary levels to society."

Higgins was plainly puzzled. "Yes, sir, I suppose so; but I don't see just what you mean."

"What I mean, Higgins," answered Dick, who never took himself so seriously as when expounding a theory, "is that nothing but a mere matter of birth accounts for the different positions which you and I occupy. With my opportunities—and take notice, Higgins, that opportunities are not the mere advantages of a single lifetime, but reach on back to the very moment when our two lines shot off from the same primitive ancestor. Well, with my opportunities you might have accom-

plished twice as much as I have. You are ambitious, aren't you, Higgins?"

"Yes, sir," replied the butler, nodding his head earnestly. "It took a heap of ambition for me to climb up to my present position."

"That's just it," said Dick in the joyous voice of an evangelist who has at last found the secret gate to a hearer's inmost soul. "That's just it; it took a climb for you to get where you are; and yet looking at it in a large way, Higgins, a life devoted to serving the domestic wants of fellow-equals, is no fit scope for a man of ambition. Merely being a man entitles you to a liberal education and an opportunity to climb any heights to which the germ of your being impels you. We are different—there is no use to deny it—some of us are mighty oaks, some are apple trees, while some are, well, gooseberry bushes, for instance. We can't all grow to the same size; but we are each entitled to all the moisture and all the sunshine and all the good rich soil we can use. You see what I mean?"

"Yes, sir," answered Higgins, his face reflecting the enthusiasm which radiated from Dick's. "You mean that it is healthier to live in the country than in town. Mr. Bannington, your father, held the same views, and that is why he came out here to live. Oh, yes—"

"You take too narrow a view," demurred Dick. "You look at everything from a purely personal standpoint; you do not rise to a height and look at human affairs as—as a bird looks at golf links. You must not stop with the question, 'How will this affect me?' but must ask broadly, 'How will this affect the entire race

and the countless generations yet to come?" It is base to take a merely selfish interest in civilization; you must consider whether this age is doing everything in its power to remove the struggle for existence, to promulgate the cleansing forces of knowledge, to cultivate the gentle strength of higher, broader, purer love. You must consider—"

"You must excuse me now, sir," interrupted Higgins, the extreme blankness of whose expression was feebly attempting to portray the extent of his perplexity. "I am deeply interested, and at some future time I shall be pleased to consider—to consider all these things; but just now, sir, I must consider arrangements for dinner."

The butler bowed apologetically and withdrew, and Dick heaved a long sigh as he gazed after him. "That's always the way," he complained audibly. "Now, there is a man with his heart open to conviction, and yet at the very moment when an opportunity presents itself for him to receive the instruction for which his poor, starved soul is yearning, he is called away to attend to some trivial ceremony in our artificial mode of life. Come to think of it, though," continued Dick thoughtfully, "dinner is not an artificial ceremony. I wonder why luncheon is not ready. He said dinner; I hope they have not cut out luncheon altogether."

Dick was just at that full tide of youth when immaturity is most repulsive. Newly come face to face with the problems of the centuries, he saw in them crafty and unsuspected enemies of his race, and longed to meet them in mortal combat. He felt that his majority

had made him a knight and he was much ashamed of the three years which had elapsed before he had armed himself cap-a-pie to set out on his own crusade.

No more of the impulsiveness of youth for him, no more the idle jest and wanton prank. The world was not a pleasure ground, not a mock tournament, but a great battle-field wherein the forces of greed and ignorance were marshalled against the forces of charity and knowledge, and on his unscarred banner he had blazoned the single word, Duty.

It would have pained him grievously if he had suspected that his very enthusiasm was an earmark of youth. When he encountered a mirror he drew his face into stern lines, and he fondly fancied that his very soul had become firm and inflexible. But youth possesses remarkable vitality, and it takes many bitter disappointments to rout it utterly from a clean, healthy body. Wherefore, in unguarded moments, Dick was quite completely under the control of appetites and desires which are neither necessary nor incidental to extreme age, but which clamor and demand with boyish vehemency.

Just now he was soundly hungry, and as he strode into the hall in search of information he came face to face with the maid, Gladys, whose face, it must be confessed, was not an unpleasant face to come face to face with.

CHAPTER III

THE SERVANTS TAKE NOTICE

NOW the mind of the maid was not like unto the mind of the butler. He had at a very much earlier period been filled with an ambition to become a butler. He had achieved this ambition. Consequently he desired that the position of butler be appreciated at its full value; and he so conducted himself that even a chance observer would at once perceive that he was a person of importance.

Early in life he had determined to be English, but in this ambition he had not been completely successful. He had acquired the trick of dropping his "aiches" very gracefully, but he could never stick them on at the wrong places without appearing self-conscious, and as he well knew that in a butler the next best thing to being devoid of self is to be unconscious of it, he regretfully relinquished the greater joy and tried to make up for it by cultivating an expression whose blankness was a model of perfection.

The Bannington family was a bitter trial to the butler: it never entertained—at least not to the degree that Mr. Higgins conveyed by his use of the term—it was usually so filled with outside affairs that the peculiar beauty of his own serving was serenely ignored

as being a minor incidental, and strive as he would, there was everywhere the evidence of newness.

Mr. Higgins loathed newness. He longed for the dark rich dignity of polish well ingrained, and, while he held as a sacred principle the loyalty which a butler must feel for the head of the family, in his inmost soul he was forced to admit that he would never have put up with Mr. Richard Bannington all these years if it were not for the hope held out that the heir of the house was filled with that high, domineering spirit which can only thrive amidst aristocratic surroundings. As a boy Dick had been as proud and whimsical as any young prince, and Higgins had awaited his final homecoming with keen expectancy.

And now Dick had returned. Mr. Higgins had thoroughly disapproved of the three guests, even though one of them was a count. They had not criticized their quarters, they had made no impossible requests, they had even appeared pleased at the arrangements just as they had found them, and the butler feared that they were very common. Then came his interview with Dick, an interview which left him gasping with astonishment, and as he left the library he had passed close to the maid who was just outside the door and apparently intent on arranging a chair according to an unnecessarily occult plan of her own. Under ordinary circumstances he would have transferred her services to some field whose need was more perceptible, but he passed without seeing her, and so it was that Dick came on her, still engaged in her mystic cherishing of the chair which stood near the door.

The mind of the maid was active and its outlook was broad and courageous. It was already surcharged with the popular misconceptions regarding the gorgeous opportunities offered by her native land, and she stood ready to embrace one or more of these opportunities without waiting for the formality of an introduction. She had no skepticism regarding the fair chance of becoming president which each little school-boy enjoys, and she was equally optimistic regarding her own prospect of becoming the first lady of the land—unless something more lofty attracted her.

Servants seldom call themselves servants, in these United States, and they never look on their service as being more than a preliminary step to future greatness, until after many of their dream-ships have smashed on the rocks of experience. The youthfulness of our nation is largely responsible for this. It is extremely difficult to make perfectly good aristocrats out of pioneers who still retain callosities in their broad, strong hands. And also our hit-and-miss educational methods must shoulder their share of the uncomfortable situation. Schools are furnished and their general use is greatly encouraged. Children eat of the tree of knowledge and after learning the difference between wealth and poverty, they are usually more willing to risk their souls on the rocks of wealth than their bodies amidst the shoals of poverty.

This situation produces untold domestic anguish, but in addition to holding such sentiments in their most advanced form, Gladys, the Bannington maid, was a diligent student of the magazine sections of three

Sunday newspapers, so that her outlook was even less restricted than the prevailing and rather mediocre radicalism. This was the maid with whom Dick came face to face as he stepped into the hall. The maid's expression was demure; Dick's had the tense concentration of a hungry boy.

"I say, when is luncheon?" he asked.

"In about an hour, sir," answered the maid. She had been well drilled, in spite of her Fourth of July doctrines, and made it a rule to approach a situation discreetly.

"That's fine news, Estelle—your name is Estelle, is it not?"

"Oh, no, sir; Estelle left over a year ago. My name is Gladys."

"Much the same," responded Dick. "They belong to exactly the same species."

There was a hearty, fraternal ring to Dick's voice, and the maid smiled modestly as she said: "But I have heard so much of you that I almost feel that I know you. Estelle told me—"

The expression on Dick's face became more severe. It seemed several decades since his last vacation, and he had but little respect for the gay college boy he then was. "A servant's memory," he said gravely, "should be like an electric light—to turn on when needed and off when through with."

"Oh, she did not tell me any of her real secrets," said Gladys reassuringly. "She only—"

"Real secrets!" interrupted Dick. "What kind of talk is this? Do you suppose that her real secrets would

concern me? Do you imagine that I would have any real mutual secrets with one in my employ? Now, if you have any duties to attend to, don't let me detain you."

"Oh, I have nothing to do just now," answered Gladys kindly. "Are all poets like you?"

"Poets?" exclaimed Dick, feeling of his back hair. "What the deuce makes you think I am a poet?"

"Because," answered Gladys looking soulfully into his eyes, "you used such be-au-tiful language to Mr. Higgins just now: all about birds soaring up above the clouds and enjoying the fresh, sweet sunshine, and how life should be filled with love, and—"

Very few of our emotional utterances thrill us pleasantly on the rebound, and Dick broke in hastily: "Did I say anything like that?"

"Oh, you did," replied Gladys enthusiastically, "and lots more. It was just like an opera. I never—"

"Look here"—Dick longed to put this impertinent young woman into her proper position, but his principles restrained him from hastily deciding what this proper position was— "either your ears or my head is out of order. I was making an earnest and scientific appeal to Higgins' reasoning powers. Woman has no logic; consequently you are excused from interpreting my remarks."

Dick felt that this would have a sufficiently snuffing effect, and turned to stride across the hall, but Gladys, who was not supersensitive, interposed.

"Yes, but you said that all men are equal, and—"

"You're not a man," broke in Dick impatiently. "I

never yet saw the woman who could argue. If I ever did, I should fall down and worship her on the spot."

"I think I could learn to argue," answered Gladys not too insinuatingly.

Dick looked her in the eyes. "Nope, not you," he said with finality. "You'd only learn to talk back. Now, I don't wish to be abrupt, nor to use a purely arbitrary right, but just at this hour I always find it necessary to be alone, so if you are going to stay here, I am going outdoors. Where is Mulligan? I knew there was some one I wanted to see."

"He's at the barn, I think. He's grown awful cross since they chained him up so much."

"Chained him up!" exclaimed Dick. "Confound it, I bet his temper is ruined! I should like to know why my orders were not carried out!" Dick paused and swallowed in order to regain the gentle manner consistent to his principles, and then resumed: "I shall make a decided change in this establishment, but, of course, I shall do it in a reasonable way."

This time Dick had so far impressed the maid that he was able to cross the hall and leave the house without further conversation. He hastened to the stable. None of the men was in sight, which was not at all surprising as the work at Bannington was not strictly departmental. At times the coachman or stableman helped the gardener, and the footman used to assist the cook with the vegetables and the maid with the cleaning. As a rule there was not enough work to go around, but the natural grumbling which ensued was confined to the servants themselves. Mr. Bannington

did not insist on many things, but he did insist on living his own life in his own establishment exactly in his own way.

As Dick examined things about the stables his face took on an impatient frown. He had a discriminating eye and there was copious evidence of laxness. While he indignantly bewailed the organization of society so that one man was forced to stifle his god-like independence and become the servant of another mere man, he nevertheless resented having a personal service slighted, and he experienced difficulty in condensing these two views into a harmonious philosophy.

The three horses were fat, but lifeless; harness and vehicles were clean, but dingy; and the entire surroundings denoted mechanical care which made no attempt at excellence. A queer throaty sound from the little box-stall which his first pony had once occupied finally attracted his attention and he walked over and raised himself on tiptoe to look through the screen which shielded the upper part.

For a moment his eyes failed to detect anything in the gloom within, and then with a rather heated exclamation, he unfastened the door and threw it wide. The next moment he was on his knees and going foolish over an immense bulldog which was gurgling and wriggling and whining with plaintive delight.

"Mulligan, old sport, this hasn't been my fault. You know that I didn't have a hand in this damned outrage, don't you?" Dick took the broad head between his two hands and they gazed into each other's eyes, while the bulldog's comical screw tail quivered ecstatically.

"Oh, this is the rottenest deal I ever heard of," continued Dick earnestly. "Only one window, and that so covered with cobwebs that the light has to elbow and push in order to get through at all. What in thunder could any one mean by shutting you up in a hole like this on the third of July? Well, never you mind, old hat, there is going to be doings about this as soon as I can locate the blame. Come on out here and let's have a look at you."

The bulldog gamboled stiffly and awkwardly as he accompanied his master outside. There Dick examined him critically, pinching him, poking him with his finger, twisting his muscles, and all the while muttering threateningly.

"You are ten pounds overweight, Mulligan," he said at last in a sorrowful tone. "Somebody is going to suffer for this! Good Lord, you'd drop dead of heart stroke if you tried to do some of your old stunts. Never mind, old pal, it's training for yours from now on, and I'll mighty soon try out that fat and turn it into the old-time steel springs."

Dick finished his examination with a hearty punch in the ribs, which was the signal for a rough and tumble; but after a few moments the dog was glad to lie down and pant.

"It used to take an hour of that to get you warmed up enough fully to enjoy it," grumbled his master. "Oh, there certainly will be a shake-up at these headquarters."

The stableman, who had been doing some weeding in the kitchen garden, had been watching Dick and the

dog as he came toward the stable to do the noon feeding. The stableman had a good-humored face, and as he came nearer it became suffused with smiles. "He is in good shape, isn't he, Mr. Dick?" he called.

"Shape?" exclaimed Dick. "He has about as much shape as a pillow!" and then, with eyes flashing, he demanded: "Who ordered him shut up in that dirty hole?"

"Why, Timothy told me to put him where he wouldn't run no risk of bitin' no one," replied the abashed stableman, coming to attention.

"When did you clean that stall out?"

"I can't just say, sir. You see it hasn't been used since your pony died and—"

"Good Heavens!" broke in Dick, "that was twelve years ago."

"I don't mean, sir, that it hasn't been cleaned out since then. I mean—"

"I don't care what you mean. It's what I mean that goes from now on. Where's the coachman?"

"He's gone to see about getting the carriage fixed, sir."

"That's another pleasing symptom of his intellectual decay," flashed Dick. "Here I come home with three guests and have to hire a public conveyance. The horses are out of condition, the harness is out of condition, the carriage is out of condition, Mulligan is out of condition, and unless I am able to keep my mind on other things for a while, some of you lazy loafers are going to be out of condition."

Dick had been an athlete at college, and during his

vacations he had boxed with the men in order to help out his training. Mike had once been knocked down three times in one round with eight-ounce gloves, and as he saw the genuine anger gleaming in Dick's eyes his face became anxious.

"Mr. Bannington, sir, isn't overly particular," he began, "and we've sort of got into a rut, like, but in—"

"Well, I am particular," interrupted Dick in no uncertain tones, "and in the future things have to come up to standard. I want those horses exercised this afternoon. Exercised—do you know what that means? I wouldn't dare jump Roland over a rail lying flat on the ground, while the pair look like cart horses. I want the stable cleaned up, too. Do you know what cleaning up means? And remember that the next time I wish a thing it must be ready for me. Come on, Mulligan."

Dick strode off to the house to investigate luncheon. He held his head high and his eyes were still angry. He had momentarily forgotten his principles.

Mike went on to the stables, where he paused and scratched his head reflectively. "He ain't much like the owld man, that felly ain't," he muttered. "The owld man's a little gruff at times, but he don't jump up and down on ya, while this one has the hard look of a royal duke. That's the way it goes—one generation makes the money and the next one feels it."

CHAPTER IV

EVEN THE GUESTS TAKE NOTICE

WHEN Dick had left her, Gladys, the maid, had experienced the peculiar irritation which accompanies a reprimand a trifle above one's powers of analysis. The effect is much like having one's hat repeatedly knocked awry in a crowd. At first the incident is treated as an accident, then as an ill-timed jest, but it soon becomes a fiendish indignity, and in the end one is convinced that it is an accursed conspiracy whose object is the overthrow of a bright and loving spirit.

Gladys pouted openly and, if possible, with emphasis. She had taken no liberties, she had not attempted to flirt, she had merely striven to make the welcome to the returning heir more homelike, and he had taken the opportunity to act "smart." She despised people who acted smart.

She seated herself in the rear of the hall and proceeded to think dark and gloomy thoughts about the house of Bannington. She was sick and tired of living at a place which had no feminine supervision. Of course the work was lighter, but then there was never any excitement; and if the heir was going to come back and act smart, why she would leave, and that was all there was to it. In the circle where her social

instinct found its legitimate outlet Gladys was a popular belle, and popular belles are much the same regardless of the location and size of their orbits.

As she sat thus the three guests came down the staircase and the German and the Russian turned into the library while the count crossed the hall and entered the drawing-room.

The German was short and stout with light hair and blue eyes. He wore a beard which was permitted to work out its own scheme of evolution, and his body indicated that his impulses were not in the direction of physical exertion. He appeared to be about forty-five, and in spite of his discourse it was hard to believe that he had found existence to be one long-continued torture.

The Russian was of another type: tall, gaunt, and dark, his eyes gleamed with the fervor of a mystic and a religionist. His pale face was of a cast common to the martyrs of all ages; his flesh rested but loosely on him, and it was plainly evident that it had very little voice in his final determinations. His raiment was dark and gave mute testimony that his mind had been on more important matters during its selection.

But the count was of a different type to either of these. He was of fair height, graceful, debonair, and perfectly self-possessed. He wore a silver-gray suit, and his tie matched his socks and the dainty figure in his shirt. His eyes were dark and prone to ask questions of a familiar and personal nature. His association with the companions already mentioned seemed a flagrant affront to the "birds of a feather" theory.

Emil filled and lighted a short pipe, pulled a huge volume from the book-case and seated himself in the most comfortable chair with a satisfied grunt. Ivan rested his elbow on the window-sill, his chin on his hand, and gazed wistfully on the lawn. Gladys recalled some neglected duties in the drawing-room, and conscientiously hastened to attend to them.

The count was smoking a cigarette and idly criticizing the furniture. He did not take offense at the intrusion; instead, he sought to relieve the maid's very perceptible embarrassment by greeting her with a soothing smile.

"I—I beg your pardon, sir," said Gladys. "I did not know there was any one here. I wished to arrange things a little, but another time will do just as well."

The eyes of the count fell on the eyes of the maid in a long, bold gaze. As the color rose in her cheeks, he smiled knowingly, and when she turned to leave the room, he said kindly: "Don't mind me. Go right along and make your changes." The voice of the count was musical, and although his remarks were ornamented by a slight excess of "z's," the impression was that of culture rather than foreignness.

"Oh, I shouldn't like to disturb you," answered Gladys, who was thrilling nervously—and enjoying the sensation.

"What is your name, my pretty maid?" asked the count, dropping into a chair and leaning his head on the tufted back luxuriously.

"My name is Gladys," answered the maid in a low tone, while her eyes fell to the floor.

"Gladys!" repeated Lorrain turning the name over with the relish of a connoisseur. "Gladys—how perfectly appropriate!"

The maid blushed thankfully without in the least knowing why. She felt vaguely that she was standing on the brink of an affair. Its waters appeared cool and inviting, and she hoped that she would slip in.

"Have you been long in the Bannington family?" asked Lorrain.

"Only a little over a year," replied the maid, who was busily moving pieces of furniture a foot or so from the positions they had maintained for several decades.

"That is the way in your country. Now in mine, the retainers remain generation after generation, and it is all one large family."

"Oh, some of them do over here," said Gladys. "The rest of the help has been here a long time; but I should get weary to death of it. I was educated to be a stenographer, but my health gave out."

"I could see at a glance that you were far above your station," said the count gravely. "But then," he added after a thoughtful pause, "we all have to serve society in some capacity, and all labor is equally honorable."

Gladys stole a glance at the count's slender white hands as he paused for another moment before asking abruptly: "The Bannington family—it is rather wealthy, is it not?"

"Oh, mercy, yes," answered Gladys largely. "They have tons and tons of money, but they don't do anything with it. I never heard of them giving a party,

but I suppose it is because there are no ladies in the family."

"Does Mr. Bannington go into society much?"

"Never," replied Gladys scornfully. "He might just as well be poor, the way he lives. His clothes always look alike, he never goes to the opera, and he moves between his office and this house as regular as though he was an interurban train."

"From all the money he is reported to have given away in charity, he must have a kind heart," suggested Lorrain.

"Oh, he's not so bad," admitted Gladys. "I am sure from the way he acts that he was disappointed in love when he was young, because his eyes never soften when you smile into them, and most men can't help but smile back, you know."

Lorrain's smile was one of pure amusement at this. "It is plain to be seen that those bright eyes of yours are not merely for ornament," he said. "Has Mr. Bannington any enemies?"

"Oh, somebody is always writing something mean about him in the papers, but he don't seem to mind it. The only man he seems to hate is William Burton. He is the head of another steel company and they fight each other all the time. Mr. Lorrimer, Mr. Bannington's private secretary, comes out here often and I sometimes overhear them."

"Has Mr. Burton a large family?" asked Lorrain.

"Just one daughter," replied Gladys, who had by now dispensed with the pretense of arranging furniture and was leaning on a stand in a posture which

her mirror assured her was truly captivating. "They live next to us. They bought the old Fitch property only a year ago—just for spite, Mr. Bannington says."

The count relapsed into reflection, which was disturbed by an impatient movement on the part of the maid. "At what hour is luncheon served?" he asked.

"It must be ready now," replied Gladys guiltily as she started to leave.

As she passed Lorrain he rose to his feet and their hands met. He gave hers a slight pressure, and her face was bright and rosy as she hurried down the hall. "Good flattery is wasted on such a silly creature as that," murmured the count as he took a turn about the room. "It irritates me to think of these Bannington boors having all this money. It is most appropriate that money has no *esprit de corps*. I think the maid will be useful."

Lorrain strolled across the hall and into the library where Emil immediately began a convincing argument to prove that the discovery of steel had been an important factor in the development of the human race. Lorrain was always careful to avoid being bored and as Emil warmed up to his lecture, he hummed a little dance air, and scanned the titles in the book-case.

At this juncture Dick burst into the room followed by Mulligan. "What do you think the lazy ignoramus have done with Mulligan?" he demanded angrily. "Here were two big strong men with nothing to do but exercise three horses which were never used, and they have kept him shut up in a dark hole with nothing to do but eat his heart out and take on surplus fat. I

left orders to have him washed and brushed and exercised and—tended to. All they did was to feed him, and he is ten pounds overweight and cross on account of his liver. If I can fasten the blame on any one head I shall certainly try to knock that head off. Things have come to pretty pass—”

“Do you mean to say that you would knock a man’s head off on account of a dog?” asked Ivan in a voice denoting a doubt as to his own hearing.

“I most certainly would on account of Mulligan,” replied Dick emphatically.

“Surely you are but jesting?” questioned the dismayed Ivan. “Such a thing is unbelievable in free America.”

“What has free America got to do with it?” demanded Dick. “I paid five hundred dollars for him when he was a pup, and he has taken three blue ribbons. Why, Great Scott, man, you surely aren’t able to tell a dog when you see one. But entirely aside from any intrinsic value, I had Mulligan with me the entire last year at college and he was the mascot of the team and the—”

“Five hundred dollars for a pup!” exclaimed Emil in guttural astonishment. When Emil became interested in a subject his eyes would protrude and his lips purse out and his remarks would seem to explode a few inches in front of his lips. “Five hundred dollars for a pup—when the income of the average working-man is only four hundred and t’irty-seven dollars!” Emil shook his large head protestingly.

“What has that got to do with it?” cried Dick.

"What would five hundred dollars divided among all the average working-men amount to?"

"And also the food," resumed Emil, looking reproachfully at the bulldog. "Such a dog as this large quantities of food would consume."

"Why, the year I had him at college, he cost me over four hundred dollars; food, baths, damages, and all," said Dick.

"Four hundred dollars—" repeated Emil accusingly, "and in this country at all times, over eight million children from not sufficient food, suffer."

"Well, I'm not a miracle-worker, am I?" demanded Dick impatiently. "I couldn't possibly buy enough loaves and fishes for four hundred dollars to feed eight million children for a year."

"For four hundred dollars, a year's nourishment for three small children could be provided," began Emil instructively. "You, yourself, say that already the dog is too fat. Why not, then, devote but one hundred to the dog, and with the remainder supply the wants of two poor children? I admit that the giving of indiscriminate alms is not for good, but it is better to keep two children than one bulldog, alive; and in this case the dog, also, could continue to exist. Most generally ill health is to be at the door of unscientific diet laid. A ration should consist of a proper balance of the elements. In nuts, the per cents. of fat, nitrogen—"

"Oh, chop it!" broke in Dick. "You may revel in reducing life to fractions, but I'm not a comptometer, myself. When I get a friend—a real, genuine, true-

hearted friend, like Mulligan—he gets the call before a lot of people that I never saw. I’m willing to do all I can for them, but—”

“Yes,” interrupted Emil contentiously, “but you said that already he was too fat.”

“You don’t think that all a dog needs is food, do you?” retorted Dick. “Not on your life. He needs sympathy and amusement and a bit of a lark now and again, and some one to love him and some one to love. Why, Mulligan’s been petted and mauled by half the college—do you suppose that he doesn’t know it is a devilish insult to shut him up in a dirty stable?”

“Still,” said Ivan in his low, impassioned voice, “with the cries of the hungry children going up all over the globe, I can not understand—”

“I didn’t create the entire globe, did I?” flashed Dick. “Nor I didn’t buy it, and furthermore I am not responsible for all the cries. They were going up when I arrived, and from all I can learn on the subject it was no novelty even then; but Mulligan—”

Lorrain had been leaning against the book-case, smiling with condescending amusement. Now he placed his slender hand on Dick’s shoulder and said soothingly: “Still, my dear Bannington, it seems to me that you are a trifle too sentimental about a mere dog.”

“Mere dog!” snorted Dick. “Well, if a man won’t get sentimental over a dog, what in thunder will he get sentimental over—man in the abstract? Bah, a dog don’t drink nor smoke nor borrow a lot of money nor disgrace his family, nor ever, under any circumstances, go back on his friend. Now listen to me—a

dog is the truest friend a man ever has; and if a man can't be true to one friend, I'll bet four dollars he never ruins his health working for the good of the human race."

At this point Higgins came to the library door, bowed, and said ceremoniously: "Luncheon is served, sir."

CHAPTER V

MULLIGAN, VOLUNTEER CHAUFFEUR

LUNCHEON was neither a soothing nor a truly social affair. Dick resented unsympathetic criticism. Lorrain had the faculty of irritating without especial effort; Ivan had a tender heart which throbbed in unison with the misery of the whole world without hardening toward those with whom it came into direct contact—a tender heart indeed—while Emil had cultivated the art of shutting off all things which threatened to bore him. He ate his luncheon in contented silence, Ivan in hurt silence, Lorrain in amused silence, and Dick in indignant silence. This quadruple silence finally got on the nerves of even Higgins, the butler.

"You professional lovers of humanity have the entire house at your disposal until your grouch wears away. I am going to take Mulligan for some exercise," said Dick, pushing back his chair as soon as they had finished.

"Would it not be better to discuss our plans?" asked Ivan. "We have come a long way to carry out a great purpose—is it wise to permit a dog to interfere?"

"The coming revolution is not running on so narrow a schedule that the time required to give a dog a walk is going to interfere seriously," rejoined Dick, smiling, but with the dregs of sarcasm still perceptible.

"How long a walk do you estimate will be necessary?" asked Lorrain soberly.

A hot answer sprang to Dick's lips, but he closed them tightly for a moment and then said: "Mulligan weighs seventy-five pounds, he should weigh sixty-five pounds; Emil can estimate the effect this would have on his heart action and how much exercise it would be safe to give him at the start, but I think I shall be back by three o'clock at the latest, and if you are in a decent humor by that time we can take up the lines mapped out and go into them thoroughly."

Emil had been making himself a Rochefort sandwich as an afterthought and now his white teeth bit through the hard crackers before he answered with serious calmness: "Such a question is not in an off-hand manner to be answered, neither is it important enough to receive the time necessary to go into it with thoroughness. What we ought to do is to continue our study of the chart I have prepared on the peculiar labor conditions of this country. We are with the older countries familiar; but with—"

"Good!" interrupted Dick. "That will work the ill nature out of you and when I return we shall be ready for a good work-out. So long! Remember, the place is yours."

Hastily running up to his room, Dick put on a rough tweed suit, cap and puttees, and darted out of the side door eagerly whistling the old-time call. It is good to return to one's boyhood home and it is good to feel like a boy again, and Dick was lucky enough to have this latter phase slip in without attracting his attention.

Mulligan galloped awkwardly around the corner of the house, leaped on his master, and then returned from whence he had come. Dick followed in surprise. He was not accustomed to a dog which had more important matters than a ramble to attend to. His surprise changed to indignation when he saw Mulligan seeking to gulp the contents of a platter heaped with food. "Mulligan, come here!" he called sternly.

Mulligan came with evident reluctance and Dick stormed into the kitchen. "I want it to be understood that no one is to feed that dog from now on, except myself. Don't mistake this! If I don't feed him for a week you just let him starve. Do you understand?"

"We had orders," began the cook, but Dick broke in without ceremony:

"All former orders concerning that dog are canceled. Another thing we may as well arrange right now: I don't intend to issue many orders, but when I do, I don't want them discussed; I want them carried out. Come on, Mulligan."

Dick and the dog started away at a brisk walk, leaving the cook speechless with indignation. When she recovered she tossed things right and left in a fit of rage while she stated that she had cooked her last meal for a Bannington. There was none to dispute her, so she had ample space in which to voice her entire list of grievances. The divide was reached when she clenched her fist and cried: "No, I shall stay and cook so that no one can ate it." After her passion had spent itself, she settled to level ground once more with the shrewd remark: "Well, takin' it all in all, I'd

ruther be bossed by two min thin wan woman. I'll stay on a while and see what happens."

In the meantime, Dick had recovered his usual serenity. Mulligan had not pouted, he had accepted the decision as final, placing his interrupted meal with the other useless items of past history, and was now in a mood to enter fully into the joy of the moment. He pulled on a rope, he ran after sticks, he chased squirrels, and he panted so strenuously that even Dick was satisfied that a real bulldog was still hidden away under the rolls of superfluous fat.

Suddenly, the playfulness left the dog's face and he stiffened into rigid attention while the bristles rose along his back. Following Mulligan's gaze Dick was surprised to find it resting on two figures coming toward him on a path which wound through the thick undergrowth. One was of a girl of nineteen or twenty, walking with the free open stride of an outdoor life and engrossed in playing with a beautiful collie which frisked beside her. As Dick raised himself on tiptoe to get a better view, the collie, who was to windward, happened to catch a menacing scent and he, too, stiffened with alert watchfulness.

"Keep at heel, Mulligan," said Dick in a low tone as he resumed his walk along the path.

The girl had not caught sight of him and as she rounded a clump of bushes, she gave the collie a gentle shove. It is hard for dogs to appreciate the dullness of human senses, and the collie, no doubt, supposing that she was as fully aware of the approaching strangers as he was, evidently interpreted the action as an appeal

to his chivalry. Chivalry is one of the strongest elements in the character of a collie. Sometimes the poor things are wasted on an environment which offers the inborn chivalry but little opportunity of expression; but in this case no such distressing condition prevailed. The girl would have inspired the yellowest cur of them all with chivalry.

If a dog would learn to approach an unexpected situation with discreet analysis, he would save his fond owner much embarrassment; but his habit of yielding to impulse at the most inopportune times is a certainty not to be lightly overlooked. No mere human can describe a dog fight—the actions are so much quicker than the adjustability of the dull human eye. Apparently the chivalrous collie, with a short, whiny bark, sprang on the stolid bulldog and bit the side of his neck. The stolid bulldog had studied canine anatomy during his college course and he had not the slightest superstition regarding a dog-bite. He silently and with grave gentleness seized on the collie's fore paw at the joint and settled himself to the grateful task of rendering the limb useless for the ensuing three weeks.

Dick, however, was thoroughly versed in the accomplishments of his four-footed friend, and almost as rapidly as the dogs had moved he thrust the stout stick he was carrying into Mulligan's mouth and gave his collar a throttling twist with his left hand. The collie gave one agonized yelp—he was not accustomed to fighting and the pain was becoming terrific—and as Mulligan's jaws separated, he turned tail and fled without shame through the woods. He would probably

never again retreat, but this was his first real punishment and his heart was still puppy-soft. Dick was glad to see that he used all four feet as he ran.

He was holding Mulligan in his arms and boxing his ears sternly, while Mulligan tried his best to keep from grinning. At that moment a small stick fell with a resounding whack on Mulligan's fat sides. Dick whirled and his eyes opened wide with astonishment when he saw that the stick had been wielded by the girl of nineteen or twenty and that her eyes were hot with open anger.

He dropped the dog to the ground and stood staring into the eyes of the girl; while Mulligan licked his chops reminiscently and quivered his twisted tail in suppressed joy. There is no use trying to disguise the fact that Mulligan was tough; this was not only a natural gift, it had been cultivated with scientific care, and it might as well be admitted that he gloried in it and made no attempt to eradicate it in order to make room for that universal love so beautifully spoken of in esoteric Buddhism. Like most of the rest of us he had learned that in order to enjoy the kind of society he preferred it was necessary to restrain many of his primitive appetites; but, like most of the rest of us again, he cherished these primitive appetites to his bosom and kept them fresh and strong for the occasional outbreak. After his months in the gloomy box-stall, this was life, rich glowing life, and while he was willing to accept punishment, he felt no sincere repentance in his inmost heart. He regretted that he had not been permitted to complete the task so well

sued to his capacity; but this was far from true penitence.

"That was an unjust blow," said Dick decisively.

"It would be impossible to be unjust to such a creature," retorted the girl with spirit. "No one has a right to allow a vicious brute like that to run at large."

"He is not a vicious brute, and he is not running at large," returned Dick who had recovered his control sufficiently to assume the dreadful calm which so irritates an angry woman.

"I suppose he did not bite Bayard, either."

"I don't know who Bayard is; but if he is the shepherd dog that—"

"Shepherd dog!" interrupted the girl indignantly. "Well, of course a man too ignorant to recognize a beautiful Scotch collie on sight could not be expected to have correct ideas on any subject. Bayard is already a bench winner in the puppy class, and his pedigree reaches back—"

"His pedigree may be all right," broke in Dick, using the soft voice which does not turn away wrath, "I have no fault to find with his pedigree, but he certainly has atrocious manners. What business had he to leap on Mulligan and attempt to—"

"He thought he had to defend me," interposed the girl loftily.

"He had better stick to the benches," rejoined Dick as though giving advice which had been eagerly sought. "He'll never win any prizes at thinking. Mulligan was peacefully walking at my side and even a shepherd dog ought to have some conception of the fitness of things."

If I had a dog who couldn't frame up a better excuse for fighting than that, I'd put mittens on his teeth."

"He never thought of fighting—" indignantly. "He's too much of a gentleman to stoop to vulgar fighting. But he was willing to risk his life to save mine. You know perfectly well that bulldogs are the most treacherous—"

"Treacherous? Bulldogs? Well, I can't be angry with you: your education has been entirely too limited for you to be held accountable for any kind of a break. Now, listen, while I furnish you with a few much-needed facts: a sharp-nosed dog is always jealous, and snappy, and treacherous—now don't interrupt, please—while a blunt-nosed dog is always honest, do you understand, honest; and faithful and slow to anger and—"

"Oh, they are perfect dears!" cried the girl witheringly. "Just see what a beautiful face that cherub with you has! Such a refined profile, such pleasing teeth when he smiles that adorable smile! Such a face as that would inspire any stranger with confidence."

"Of course his face is a bit grim," returned Dick, examining his pet critically. "It's fixed that way on purpose, in order to protect his heart. Why, a bulldog is so gentle and loving and friendly that if it were not for his—well, dignified and self-respecting expression, every Tom, Dick and Harry would be taking a kick at his ribs. I presume you are aware that cowardice is a very prevalent human characteristic, and that it is most commonly displayed in oppressing the weak. For instance, take our rich men—"

"Oh, never mind them—one evil at a time," interposed the girl lightly. She was cool enough by this time to find pleasure in this chance passage at arms and her eyes were flashing brilliantly as she prepared to fence with all her skill. "We are discussing bulldogs now," she resumed, "and I say that they are never trustworthy, and that this one is positively cross. Look at him."

"He is not cross," answered Dick earnestly; "his liver is out of order. You'd be peevish, too, if your liver was out of order."

The color swept into the girl's face; but she was a modern girl possessing a sense of fair play approximating the masculine, and she saw that Dick was too much in earnest to be flippant.

"Well," she rejoined bravely, "well, if it was, I'd—I'd consult a physician; not go about biting people. And it is nearly always a bulldog that goes mad and bites little children."

"It always is," replied Dick with heavy sarcasm, "and it is always a divinely beautiful girl that gets kidnapped or murdered. You appear to be pitifully unsophisticated. Haven't you ever studied styles in headlines? How would this look—A dear little cocker spaniel bites a two-hundred-pound man on the instep? No, it is always an immense bulldog, and he always lacerates the throat; but if you trace it down you will find that the sensational reporters are not generally chosen as judges at the bench shows. You have probably heard of the free press. The term means that it

is free in its choice of adjectives. Why, talking about a free press—”

“No, we are not talking about a free press, we are talking about bulldogs, which should never be free at all, but forced to remain with muzzles on, chained in their own back yards—”

“—fed on bread and water, and beaten with many stripes,” interjected Dick. “I hope if there is such a thing as transmigration of souls, I don’t come back as your bulldog.”

“You need not be alarmed. It would not surprise me in the least if you did come back as a bulldog; but as I shall never, under any circumstances, own one, you run no risk of belonging to me.”

Dick looked at the girl. She was wearing a trim, tailor-made suit of light weight material; the neck of her shirtwaist was low and a smooth, beautifully rounded throat rose from it; her complexion was clear; her hair was a dark auburn, and he thought her eyes would be a deep, soft brown—when the glint of the fray was not in them.

“Oh, come now,” he said in a new tone, “that is rather blunt, don’t you know. I would almost be willing to be your collie.”

She frowned sternly as she totally ignored his remark, and said severely, “And another thing, this is private property. What right have you, or your bulldog to be trespassing on it?”

A grin of admiration stole over Dick’s face. “Well, really you have a way with you, all right,” he said frankly. “When it comes to staking out a bluff you

don't go about it in a shy and diffident manner. If any of us three be trespassers, I can prove that it is neither Mulligan nor myself."

"I have walked here every morning for the last month, and I have never seen either you or the dog before," responded the girl with scarcely perceptible hesitation.

"I just arrived this morning; but Mulligan has been here all the time, and it is a crime that you have not seen him."

"A crime?"

"Yes, a crime. He should have been exercised every day; but instead they have kept him shut up—according to your plan."

"You know perfectly well that that is not really my plan, even for such menacing creatures as bulldogs," answered the girl, a small note of protest modifying her tone, "but from what I know of the Bannington temperament, I should not think it the kind to take much interest in the welfare of a fellow creature, much less a dumb brute. But then I suppose I should not talk this way. You are a guest, I presume."

"Yes, that's it, I'm a guest," replied Dick heartily, "but then don't mind me. I am a great admirer of free speech. Won't you take a seat so that we can continue the discussion more comfortably?"

For the first time the girl appeared to be self-conscious. "But I don't know you," she said.

"Well, you're not taking any more risk than I am—I don't know you, either. Come on, here's a convenient bench."

The girl took a few steps toward the bench, hesitated and said, "But this is horribly unconventional."

"What do you care?" rejoined Dick cheerily. "Most of our really glad hours are. You are not a conventional person, anyway. You come on another's property with a snappy dog, and it bites the perfectly behaved dog of a perfect stranger; after which you turn in and abuse the perfect stranger and his perfectly behaved dog. Now, if you have any real objections, trot them out; but don't drag in poor old overworked conventionality."

The girl looked into Dick's eyes inquiringly. They were good eyes, clean and steady, and still, in secret rebellion against his will, holding something of the knightly diffidence of boyhood. She took a few more steps and then with a quizzical smile said, "I really think I should be going."

"If thy thoughts offend thee, cast them out," responded Dick. "The only way to have any fun with a convention is to break it, and no one knows this better than yourself. If we had been properly introduced you would have been bored to death trying to start a conversation; whereas, you know that you have fairly revelled in the opportunity to flay a perfect stranger. A few moments ago, I was a perfect stranger, you know."

"No, you were only a stranger," murmured the girl dreamily. "Men are never perfect."

"I suppose that is true," assented Dick. "At least it is said often enough. Now, then, sit down and let's have a truce for full five minutes."

The girl was thoroughly enjoying the spice of adventure which her carefully trained conscience found quite pungent. She sat on the bench at a safe distance from Dick and looked at Mulligan as though she were really afraid of him. "What is your name?" she asked without raising her eyes.

Dick waited a moment and then answered: "He does everything except talk. His name is Mulligan."

"That is stupid. Any one could tell that his name was Mulligan after one glance at his features—they are so prize-fightery. I meant what is your name?"

"My name?" hesitated Dick. "Oh, yes, my name— Why, my name is— But then, what is yours? It is always customary to give your own name first when asking the name of another."

"We do not care anything about customs," scoffed the girl. "They are as obsolete as conventions. I claim priority of question—what is your name?"

"Foiled again! Well, I am not ashamed of my name; my name is John Paul Jones."

"John Paul Jones," repeated the girl thoughtfully. "It seems to me that I have heard that name before. I know I have heard the first name, I distinctly recall having heard the second, and I have a vague recollection of having heard the last, while the entire combination, although misty, seems to have rather a familiar sound. I shall be equally frank; my name is Mary Smith."

"I am pleased to meet you, Miss Smith," said Dick, shaking hands ceremoniously. "Are you any relation to the Smiths who live in Brooklyn?" They both

laughed and Dick resumed, "But honestly, I am delighted to meet you."

In spite of its burlesque, it was so much like a formal introduction that for a moment they were silent, and then the girl said: "Isn't it odd how little it takes to amuse a human being? Here we have been either talking utter nonsense or else we've been saying the usual things in the usual way, and yet it has been rather interesting."

"Not so fast," cried Dick eagerly, seeing an opportunity for discussion. "You have accidentally stumbled on the foundation of social relations. It is not what is done in the world that makes us thrill, it is what we do ourselves. There is nothing original about ham and eggs, and yet if you were to cook the ham and eggs, and I were to help you eat them, it would be an unforgettable feast. It is the 'usness' of the situation which makes it delightful!"

The girl smiled, but he noticed that the curtains were drawn a shade closer across her frank eyes. "I did not intimate that it was delightful," she said. "I merely remarked on the easy standard by which we measure amusement."

"That's right, be consistent; if you fail to rub it in completely the first time, try, try again. Do you reside in the neighborhood?"

"I don't live so very far—just a pleasant walk."

"I'll swear it would be. When you start back, I shall go along and make the test."

Again the smile, again were the curtains drawn, and this time she rose, saying: "Oh, no, indeed. And,

come to think of it, I must hurry home at once. I must see what has become of Bayard."

"Bayard is all right. At the rate he was going when last seen, I have no hesitancy in saying that he has arrived at his destination, no matter where it was. I want to get better acquainted. Do you do the society much?"

"Oh, no, I—I am a poor girl, you know," she replied, seating herself once more.

Dick made a critical examination as he replied: "You wear no rings; but that may only be a sign of good sense. Your clothes are not very trimmy either; but that also may only be another sign of good sense. But that collie with the pedigree and the bench ribbons—that is neither a sign of good sense nor of poverty."

"The dog was a gift," answered the girl. "But what do you mean about my clothes not being trimmy?"

"Well, they haven't any of this uniform stuff on them, nor a lot of that fluffy, flop-doodle flubdub, and—"

"Do you mean that this dress is not becoming?" demanded the girl as she tried to pull the skirt a little farther over her walking shoes.

"Goodness, no! I trust I am not an arrant coward; but neither am I absolutely reckless. Your dress is so becoming that it just suits you. It is a—a pleasing frame for a perfect picture. It seems part of you, in fact. Why, until a moment ago I was not aware that you had a dress on. Now I see that the reason was—"

"Never mind the reason. A man's reason is seldom interesting. It is a slow, dreary, painful—"

"Slow?" interrupted Dick. "Why it seems to me—"

"Never mind. I have no hope that you will know any more about seams than you do about fit and trimming. We will not discuss it further."

"Just like a woman! They make a lot of harsh statements and then say, 'we will not discuss it further.'"

"And you are just like a man. They always preface every nasty remark with, 'that is just like a woman.' Now, I really must be going."

She rose as though the interview was ended and this time Dick also stood up. "When am I to see you again?" he asked a little wistfully.

"How can I tell?" she rejoined and there was a new, delicate shading to her voice also. She had found this stranger refreshing and even youth sometimes has an intuitive instinct to cling to its happy moments. "Maybe this evening, maybe to-morrow, maybe—never. You are stupid enough to stand as a type of your sex: first you call Bayard a shepherd dog, then you gaze on a charming costume for hours and have the effrontery to say that you did not know I had one on; and finally, you admire bulldogs. I fail to see anything attractive in the list of your accomplishments."

"You get discouraged too easily. These attributes you have mentioned are not accomplishments; they are—"

"They are certainly not attractions," interposed the girl. "What are they?"

"Well, I must say that you have a fine, easy way with you, all right."

"That is like a man again. Always he pretends that

he is eager for the truth; but always he chooses flattery."

"I couldn't quite help being a man, you know," protested Dick. "Some of us have greatness thrust upon us. But to return to the list of traits. Suppose we call them vices? Wouldn't you like to reform some one so that there may be a star in your crown?"

"Yes, indeed! But I prefer better material to work on. Here I have wasted hours on you and you do not show the slightest improvement."

"That is the second time you have dragged in the word hours; as though we had been marooned on a desert reef for half a lifetime. Now, the time hasn't been so tedious with me. It has danced along like one delicious moment."

"That was really quite decently said, and I forgive most of your former crudities; but really I must hurry away."

"Before you go," said Dick as a last resort, "I want you to shake hands with Mulligan and make the *amende honorable*."

"I could never bring myself to touch the creature," cried the girl. "I fear he would bite me."

"That is rank affectation. You know perfectly well that every bulldog dotes on petting. Why, you could put your hand down his throat and tickle the roots of his tongue, and he would only grin about it."

"What a delightful privilege!" she mocked. "But I can't quite believe it."

"Nonsense! Come now and shake hands with him. He's a sensitive soul in spite of his rugged build."

Dick seated himself on the bench and took Mulligan's broad head between his hands. The girl walked over to them and held out a firm brown hand. The dog was in the act of offering his paw when she suddenly straightened and said decisively: "I must really go at once! No, do not try to detain me, I positively must go. Good afternoon."

Giving him no time for a reply she turned and entered the tangled path, walking hastily in the direction from which she had come. Dick gazed after her in helpless surprise for a moment and then he heard a slight sound behind him. Turning, he saw his three friends, and on each face, even on Ivan's, was a knowing grin.

CHAPTER VI

MISS BURTON AT THE WHEEL

BLESSED is the privilege of friendship. After a man is one's friend, it is no longer necessary to regard the little whims and fancies about which one may be sensitive; while on the other hand one may be sure that if one arrives at an inopportune time, the fact will not be long kept a secret. Dick's expression conveyed none of the warmth of welcome, nor did his words present the formal courtesy for which the Oriental is noted. With simple directness and with some little heat, he demanded: "What the dickens do you fellows want, anyway?"

"If we had guessed that you had a tryst, we should not have intruded," answered Lorrain blandly. "But why did you not present us? The young lady was charming."

"Young lady?" returned Dick. "What young lady? That's not a young lady; that's merely a poor girl of the neighborhood. She's been taking her prize-winning collie out for a walk. I thought you were going to plan a campaign while I took Mulligan for a work-out. I told you I should join you before three. The poor thing was sadly in need of exercise."

Lorrain laughed as he put his hand on Dick's shoulder. "Ah, Richard," he said, "you may become a great

commander, a great orator, or a great politician; but never a great diplomat. The poor Mulligan gets but little of the much-needed exercise, shaking hands with the poor girl of the neighborhood. And what need of a revolution or even a reformation, when the poor girls, wearing exquisite walking gowns, take their prize-winning collies out for exercise? It is now after four o'clock, and where is the collie?"

"The collie was a gift. When I said poor girl it did not necessarily imply that she was a slum-dweller. There are graduating levels in poverty. We don't go from golden pheasant to a dry crust in one step. To the richest man all other men are poor; to the poorest, all other men are rich." Dick was forgetting his irritation in making a path for some of his pet theories. "Now, the main thing is not so much the amount of a man's fortune in the abstract; but in comparison with that of other men. We must not lose sight of the fact that—"

"—that Mulligan needs exercise," interjected Lorrain, laughing.

"How can you interrupt with nonsense about a dog?" demanded Ivan, who had been warming his hands at Dick's little blaze. "He had just made a strong point. It is, indeed, not the size of the fortune which counts; but its comparative size."

"That is the whole thing in a nut-shell," corroborated Emil. "Man does not select the most comfortable scale on which to live; constantly he is striving to accumulate more in order that he may on the same scale as the one a little richer than himself live. This is

bound in unhappiness to result. Take this country for instance: in eighteen hundred the millionaires only numbered—”

“Emil, will you kindly desist?” protested the count. “Always you make me feel like a blackboard. Never do you miss a chance to put a lot of figures on me. Man does not live by statistics alone. And you, Richard, are getting so that you can no longer converse—you must ever be making the grand oration. And Ivan so constantly throws suffering humanity in my face that I can taste it. I do not greatly enjoy the taste of suffering humanity.”

“Neither do you seem over anxious to labor for it,” chided Ivan. Ivan’s world was a vast altar and he spent his life in religious sacrifice. Most of us speak glibly of universal love, but it is generally an idea, not an emotion, and the very man who will be in a panic of sympathy when one of his own pinches a finger will read of a hundred men shut up in a burning mine—and forget about it five minutes after. The social conscience marks the highest level to which man has so far advanced; but it is still too isolated to create an epidemic. Ivan was a sensitive nerve center and all the anguish waves of this little round world brought their throbs to his tender heart. His was a beautiful character, but it must be confessed that a streak of humor would have increased his charm as a companion.

As Lorrain merely made a deprecativè gesture in response to Ivan’s remark, Emil said sternly: “Neither do you wish to avail yourself of the necessary facts which will a proper comprehension of real conditions

give. You are like the schools, the colleges, and the universities. In this country there are four hundred and twenty-three institutions for higher education. Of these only five are with adequate chairs of sociology provided; and even these—”

“There is more than a grain of truth in all this, Lorrain,” broke in Dick. “If you do not keep in training you can not hope to convince the chance listener whom fate thrusts on you.”

“Chance listener is all right,” grumbled Lorrain. “Talk him to death if you are able; but spare me. You are all immensely fond of the parable, listen: A mill there was which never stopped grinding, and much of the time there was no grain to grind; so in the end the mill ground itself to pieces. Now, never you mind, Emil; I do not care how many mills there are in this country, nor what their capacity is. What I am trying to expound, is that because you lack tact you are apt to become bores, and the bore seldom has much influence. It is impossible to batter down established institutions as a bull would batter down a wall. You are not content to devote yourselves to tearing out a few stones at a time—”

“And at times,” interrupted Ivan solemnly, “it seems to me that you are like a fox who would set his fellows to find a way through the wall; but if he himself found the way first he would go quietly to the sweet grapes and say nothing at all about it.”

“Foxes in this country do not eat grapes, Ivan,” said Dick, who saw that his friends were rapidly nearing the point where the abstract argument would be de-

serted for the personal taunt. "But looking at this discussion in my usual broad-minded way I am convinced that you are all partly right. It is now too late for us to formulate any plans before dinner; so I suggest that you return to the library and amuse yourselves. I—I want to finish Mulligan's exercise now."

Emil and Ivan looked at Dick in surprise, but Lorrain grinned knowingly.

"Poor dog," he said with mock commiseration, "it is readily to be seen that in the condition he now is it would make him nervous to have any one but his master go walking with him. Come, comrades, let us return to the house."

"I do not understand," said Emil ponderously. "Obesity is not of nervousness provocative, while sociability is most efficacious in the treatment of nervous disorders—"

At this point Lorrain gave Emil a gentle shove and the three returned to the house, Emil continuing his discourse upon the pathology of neuremia. Emil was conversant with the philosophy of humor, but he dealt in it merely as an unsuspected by-product.

"Lorrain is right," muttered Dick to himself, "our mill grinds too much. I wish that three-fourths of it had remained in the house this afternoon. Well, I am going to see if I can discover the place where the fairy princess enters the enchanted woods. Come on, Mulligan, you enticing old mut. You're a cunning little cupid, you are!"

Dick stooped and seizing his canine friend by the scruff of the neck, he first shook him and then tossed

him off to the right. This was the cue for Mulligan to growl savagely and spring on his master as though he would tear him to pieces. Engrossed in their rough play, both were startled by a scream, and looking up, Dick found that he had almost collided with a lady in whose expression fear and indignation struggled for the mastery.

“How dare you allow such a vicious brute as this to run at large?” she demanded.

Dick’s bump of combativeness was healthily prominent; furthermore, this lady was not a beautiful young girl of nineteen or twenty. Her hair was streaked with gray. She was tall, angular, and her voice was a trifle harsh. “Now, I’m getting tired of this,” he said, not trying to hide his irritation. “In the first place this is not a vicious brute, in the second, he is not running at large, and in the third, he has a right to be the first if he chooses, and to do the second if I choose. Furthermore—”

“Have you no regard for the life of another?” interposed the lady. “Will your conscience permit you to maintain a beast which is liable at any moment to tear some poor child to pieces? Are you aware that you are trespassing on private land and that if you are discovered—”

“Excuse me,” said Dick persuasively; “but while you are framing up a few more questions, I beg leave to ask if you are a member of the Law and Order League or merely an insurance agent?”

“How dare you ask me such a question? Of course, I am neither.”

"Well, that bluff about my being on private land has been pulled on me once before to-day, and it just occurred to me that I should like to know what it was which made your presence here necessary."

For an instant a shade of feminine trepidation crossed the lady's face; there are very few of us who do not get comfort out of feeling that we are right when we put on the high gear to go ahead; and there was an assurance in Dick's attitude which implied firm faith in his own position. The lady was not without courage, however, so she tossed back her head and gave Dick a haughty glare.

"Really, your question is most impertinent," she stated convincingly, "but the truth is that I am looking for a girl, a mere child, who came here to take a walk."

Instantly many subtle changes took place in Dick's expression. "Yes, of course," he said soothingly, "and what is the child's name and where does she live? I shall be only too glad to assist in finding her."

The lady glanced at him sharply. "I do not feel that it is necessary to tell you either her name or address," she replied with cautious finality. "It is plainly evident that you have not seen her, and are therefore not in a position to aid me; so if you will hold that ferocious animal, I shall withdraw."

Without deigning to bow, the lady turned and started to retrace her steps with much stiffness. "Yes, but wait," called Dick. "Did the child have a dog with her?"

"She did. Did you see them?"

"A big, rough, wolfish sort of a mongrel?" The

lady nodded her head. She was evidently more eager to find the girl than to have the dog treated with consideration. "Savage temper," continued Dick, "nasty habit of leaping on peaceful, law-abiding dogs and attempting to slay them—name, Bayard?"

"Yes, that was the dog," replied the lady eagerly. "Where have they gone?"

"They have gone," began Dick, then paused and put on an expression of deep import. "But no, you have refused to tell me her address, I refuse to reveal her present whereabouts."

Dick folded his arms and frowned loftily. Little lines of anxiety formed about the lady's eyes. "But the conditions are entirely different," she pleaded. "I am worried about her."

"And you have good cause."

"Why, what do you mean? You alarm me! Tell me where she is?"

Dick's manner again changed. "Do you know on whose property you are now standing?" he flashed, pointing tragically at her feet.

It requires more than a strong mind to remove the feminine entirely from a woman. The lady seized her skirts and jumped. "For pity's sake, do not speak like that!" she cried indignantly. "You are making me nervous."

"You have good cause to be nervous. Do you know whose property this is?"

"Yes, I know whose property this is, most assuredly. Why?"

Dick slowly took a pencil and note-book from his

pocket. "Now, then, I am ready. What is your name?"

"I do wish that you would stop! I refuse to tell you my name."

"Then," said Dick quietly, "I shall be forced to take you to headquarters."

"Don't you dare to touch me!"

"Then you must answer my questions. Is the child you are seeking your daughter?"

"Certainly not. I am unmarried."

Dick wrote the answer with inflexible gravity. "Very good," he said. "Is she related to you?"

"Yes, she is a cousin, several times removed."

"Does she live with you?"

"Why are you asking me these questions, and what right have you to do it?"

"Madam," replied Dick with condescending courtesy, "if you were more conversant with modern conditions, you would know that most of us are forced to do things repugnant to us, in order to make a living. Again I ask you, does she live with you?"

"What is your position here?"

"In the future, I am to be inspector of grounds, and it will be my painful duty to prevent trespassing. Does she live with you?"

"When did you come here?"

"This morning, thank you. Does she live with you?"

"Yes, she does live with me."

"Thank you. Now, then, what is your name?"
Dick held his pencil poised and kept his eyes on the

note-book. The lady swallowed twice, and it was apparent that what she swallowed was of a very bitter taste.

"I am Miss Burton, and now I have answered all that I intend to. I presume that you are acting under orders; but if I were a big strong man like you, I should be ashamed to get my living in such a way. I have answered your questions, and now I want you to answer mine. Here is fifty cents as a tip. Where is this girl and her dog?"

After examining it carefully, even going to the extent of biting it, Dick put the coin in his pocket, with an expression of great virtue on his face. "I pledge you my word of honor, I do not know," he answered. "The dog left quite suddenly and did not mention his destination. The girl was a trifle more deliberate, but was equally reticent regarding her name and address. Therefore, I am deeply grateful for the kind information which you have so graciously bestowed."

For a moment the lady glared at him, while her vials of wrath began to effervesce noticeably. "You are exactly the kind of servant I should expect to find in the Bannington menage," she finally said with a slight tremble in her voice. "But I am convinced that your churlish manners are due to your despicable position, as there is a completeness to your vulgarity which is entirely beyond the simplicity of ignorance. Will you kindly control that vicious beast until I have had time to leave the grounds?"

Carrying her head at the most haughty angle, and planting her feet with dignified firmness, the lady

strode wrathfully along the little path until the tangle swallowed her.

“What a discriminating command of language!” exclaimed Dick, gazing after her admiringly. “How seldom it is that we find one who comprehends the beautiful spreading power of our dear old mother tongue! Now, she did not use one word of profanity, and yet she brought out all its rich effects.”

Suddenly the hilarious joy of his afternoon’s adventures swept over him and he broke into a peal of laughter. Forgotten was his life-mission; forgotten was the great dignity of his venerable age. He slapped his thighs; he performed a grotesque war-dance; he chanted a nonsense rhyme which began: “Oh, rich, rich, gloriously rich!” and as Mulligan caught the spirit and frolicked with him, a stranger would have been justified in taking him for a mere college boy, gloating over a successful prank.

At last he sank on the bench and gave a long contented sigh. The bulldog leaped to the seat beside him and endeavored to lick his chin. “Mulligan, old sport,” he said, throwing an arm about the dog, “I don’t blame you for getting cross. I’d be fairly raving if I were chained up with all this glorious game right at my very own door. The young one certainly has loosened the lock on my heart, Mulligan; but the old one strained all my intercostal muscles. If I had started to chuckle while she was yet with us, I should have died in a convulsion. My ‘vulgarity is too complete for the simplicity of ignorance, wherefore it must be laid to my despicable position’—and she gave me a

tip! Oh, Mulligan, after all, life is sometimes worth the candle.

"Well, we must hie home and tog up for the evening feed. No knowing what may happen if the earnest Ivan and my respected uncle lock horns. Come, fat-head, I can beat you to the house."

Leaping, dodging, and making joyously incoherent noises, the scion of the house of Bannington and the bulldog that no longer suffered from ennui, tore along the path which led to the house, and the evening shadows gathered in the fifteen private acres of Bannington Park.

CHAPTER VII

THE MACHINE SKIDS

AS the three friends left Dick and returned to the house, they were forced to walk single file. Emil walked in front and lectured learnedly on the nerves. As he progressed in distance, he also enlarged on his subject. In a short time he had deserted the merely physical attributes of the nerves, and dwelt lovingly on the effect which social evolution had had on them; pointing out that the primitive man, who knew not that he had nerves, was the only man who found undiluted pleasure in them, showing that even the moderate development from savagery to barbarism had started the nerves to jangling, while civilization had goaded them to such a state of supersensitiveness that simple conservatism required one to look on insanity as a natural and useful safety-valve.

Ivan, who walked next, glanced from time to time at the broad shoulders of the plump Emil, and marveled that civilized nerves should under any circumstances select such an apparently phlegmatic environment. But Ivan's mind was busy on other things. He had given the servants, in Dick's name and at Dick's request, a dozen or so pamphlets, and he was speculating on the possible crop which this small sowing might yield. Ivan did not have a mission in

life; a mission in life had him, and the conditions are distinctly different. At the first intersection Lorrain turned from the path they were following and started off at a tangent with a sigh of relief.

"The nerves in the human body correspond to the telegraph and telephone in the social body," said Emil, threatening Ivan with upraised finger as they seated themselves in the library. "It is possible to send so high a voltage over a wire that it will fuse. Now in the body—"

"What do you think is the reason that house-servants are so hard to convince?" interrupted Ivan reflectively. "The servants in this household seem to be intelligent, and they accepted the pamphlets I gave them, but as a class, domestic servants are only to be won with much effort."

"Are they ill-fed?" demanded Emil sternly. "Are they unexpectedly thrown out of employment? Do they live in wretched slums and see their children out of garbage pails eat? No, they, on the contrary, amidst luxury live, and they, in a measure, are parasites. The wild wolf is often hungry, but he would sooner starve to death than give up his freedom. Could you imagine a flea braving famine and pestilence his independence to gain. Whenever I wish accurate information to gain, I to myself some animal who is like some man, picture, and then I see how it is exactly. Through evolution, man—"

"It is a noble thing for Dick to oppose his uncle's will," murmured Ivan thoughtfully. "I wonder how it will turn out."

"Dick is beyond accurate solution," replied Emil. "He has never been hungry, he has never seen his ideals trampled underfoot while he had to stand by and pretend to smile. Never yet has he been tried by the fierceness of real fire. With curiosity his outcome I await."

"He is with the movement, heart and soul," said Ivan staunchly.

"Bah," returned Emil, waving his hand. "A scientific socialist he is not. It is with him a pastime, a game. Much joy a struggle, a combat, gives him. If it were to be a bloody revolution, yes; but to see with clearness and yet with patience to wait, ah, who can tell? He is not a reality socialist."

"He has the heart of a socialist," said Ivan with fervor.

"Socialism is not of the heart," replied Emil scornfully. "Socialism is cold and unflinching and just. Socialism is of the head."

"Yes, but the heart has reasons, which the reason does not know," answered Ivan with feeling.

"Pascal," grunted Emil. As a rule Emil did not refer to authorities. If one of his associates was deluded into thinking that he had formulated an original package for a thought, he usually contented himself with repeating the actual author mentally. When he spoke the name aloud it was a sign that the remark had irritated him. "You, yourself, a socialism have, which is more of religion than of science," he said. "You still believe that the world can be made right by one heart at a time converting, while I—"

At this moment Lorrain entered. "It seems that our friend, Dick, is going to have other affairs in his own country than helping along the revolution. Well, the girl was a beauty and I admire his taste."

"She is probably a worker in the cause," said Ivan reverently.

"Such a worker as that would be good for any cause," laughed Lorrain.

"There are to-day," said Emil placidly, "over fifteen million women who have at heart the great, peaceful revolution. Why, in Russia alone—"

"Never mind Russia, Emil," scoffed Lorrain. "No one in Russia is ever peaceful."

"The people of Russia are as peaceful as any people," defended Ivan. "You also in France had a Reign of Terror."

"Very true," granted Lorrain condescendingly, "but we had it as an acute attack, only, and recovered; while you have it chronically."

"Nevertheless," vouchsafed Emil, "the loss of life during the Reign of Terror was—"

"Emil, stop," shouted Lorrain who had no weapon with which to fight the stolid German. "Do you realize that it is almost a reign of terror to live with you? One can not converse on any subject without having you pour a flood of figures on him. I wonder where all the servants are?"

"They are intelligent servants," answered Ivan. "I have talked with them and given them pamphlets. I think they will join the cause."

"If you are not circumspect, Uncle Richard will tell

you to join those who have died in their sins," laughed Lorrain. "Let us play a game of billiards; there is a good table on the third floor."

"No," replied Ivan, "I have no time to waste on a mere game when the world is crying out for me to save it."

"You have a wondrous capacity for enjoyment, Ivan," said Lorrain satirically. "Well, you go and save as much of the world as you can; but you'll take a cue, won't you, Emil?"

"If one is to keep at one's best, it is essential the well-rounded life to live," replied Emil. "In billiards one has exercise for the body and the mind; while if the game is close, the emotions also are into play brought. I shall be glad to take a cue."

"That's right," said Lorrain, taking his friend's arm and leading him to the stairway.

"Are you aware," said Emil, as his bosom began to expand with the joy of competitive pastime, "that in the average game of billiards the cue-ball a distance of two and one-third kilometers travels; while in the game played by experts, the ball only—"

Ivan rose and strolled moodily out to the barn. Ivan often doubted that knowledge was power. Sometimes it seemed to him that it was merely a locomotive still unfinished in the shops.

Shortly after this the head of the house returned and rang the front door-bell. He greatly enjoyed having the butler open the front door and bow respectfully as he entered. It seemed to him that his business cares were removed from his shoulders when the

butler opened the door, and for years it had been opened at the first touch of the electric button. This time there was no response.

It had been a hard day and Bannington had been hoping that he would find his nephew in a more compliant mood than he had left him. He did not intend to talk business with him, however; he was determined to bury his own troubles and bring the boy out, lead him into talking of his trip and then work gradually up to a discussion of practical things at home and abroad. Richard Bannington lived in a strictly practical world, or, which is much the same thing, he was convinced that he did. There was nothing outwardly practical in a man with a latch-key in his pocket standing on his own door-step and punching savagely at an electric button, but this he continued to do for several minutes while his anger took audible and slightly profane expression.

Finally he opened the door with his key and after entering, slammed it with a bang. He strode down the hall and into the library. It was empty and he crossed and entered the drawing-room. There he saw the maid sitting in the most comfortable chair and reading a pamphlet. For a moment Bannington stood still in a daze. He had never before doubted that his establishment was run on systematic and practical lines. Dick had severely criticized its looseness during his last vacation; but to the elder man, it moved with mechanical precision, and he could scarcely believe his eyes.

Gladys had only read three pages of the pamphlet

which she had selected before she was convinced that she favored the revolution and that it loomed large on the immediate horizon. As she was fond of excitement, she at once decided that it was her duty to lend the movement her aid, and that without delay. The other servants were slower, the men being opposed to any active demonstrations at this time; but the cook was still smarting from Dick's reprimand and she stood with the maid. The men were shamed into joining the rebellion by Gladys agreeing to take her post in the front of the house and meeting the first attack. Thus, the domestic staff was practically on strike.

Gladys' heart was beating rapidly when Bannington paused in consternation at the drawing-room door. She had gone over her speech of defiance, she knew that she was merely carrying into practice the theories which the son of the house advocated; but when the vital moment arrived the situation assumed entirely new proportions. She kept repeating to herself: "I have nothing to lose but my chains, I have nothing to lose but my chains;" but just at this time the chains themselves became unexpectedly attractive, and appeared to be her normal support in a position of comparative ease and comfort. Still, she always wanted to know how things were going to turn out, so she kept her eyes on the pamphlet and hoped that her voice would not break when she proceeded to maintain her inalienable rights.

"Where is that fool butler?" demanded Bannington, stamping his foot. The maid gave a little bounce but

did not raise her eyes. "I mean you—where is that fool butler?"

The maid raised her eyes slowly and a thrill of pride shot through her as she answered with outward calm: "I do not know any fool butler."

"You don't, huh?" Bannington was still too shocked to appreciate the conditions. "Well, there was a person answering to that description by the name of Higgins, still in my employ when I left this morning. Where is he?"

"I last saw Mr. Higgins in the dining-room a half-hour ago," replied Gladys with quiet dignity.

Bannington emitted a growling snort. "What was he doing? Stand up when I come in, and when you do sit down, find some other place. What are you reading? Give it to me!"

The maid tried with all her strength to remain seated; she found it impossible. Something within her raised her to her feet and made her take a step toward her employer.

"Where did you get it?" he asked as he jerked the pamphlet from her hand.

"It was given to me by Mr. Dick, sir."

Bannington turned the book over savagely and read its title aloud: "*The Uncontrovertible Land-title Theory*. Have you any land-titles which are bothering you?"

"No, sir."

"Then why the devil do you bother the land-titles? Now, you've gone just as far on this road as it's healthy. Here—tear this thing up and throw it in

the scrap basket; and send that fool butler to me at once."

The maid tore the pamphlet with malicious resentment and hastened from the room; while Bannington doubled up his fists and made violent gestures. "This is enough to give a man paresis!" he exclaimed savagely. "Here I have been working my head off trying to keep the Bannington plant in the lead, longing for the time to come when that young cub could buckle to and help me; and now he comes back with a trio of educated tramps and a cart-load of fool theories and begins work by distributing anarchist tracts to my servants. I suppose I'll have to fire the lot of them just as I've got them so they suit me; but I can't very well fire him. Oh, hang the luck, anyway!"

He whirled about as he finished and came face to face with the butler who had entered the room with evident reluctance. Bannington stood and glared at him and the butler swallowed repeatedly and at each swallow looked a shade more like an embarrassed white rabbit.

After staring at him until Higgins felt the cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, Bannington surprised him by asking in a very mild tone: "What is that in your hand, Higgins?"

The mild tone suggested a hidden menace and was far more sinister than the harsh demand, against which Higgins had braced himself, would have been. "This is a book, sir, which Mr. Dick requested me to read," he answered apologetically.

"A book, is it?" asked that young man's uncle with

gentle interest, although flames seemed to shoot from his eyes. "What is the title of the book, Higgins?"

"U—U—*Universal Brotherhood, or the Law of Equal Inheritance*, sir," replied the butler desperately.

"Have you lost any brothers, Higgins?" inquired Bannington solicitously.

"N—no, sir."

"I congratulate you. Have you inherited anything?"

"No, sir—but this book says that I am entitled to something, just because I'm a man."

"You're not a man, Higgins," said Bannington, as one who kindly imparted a welcome fact. "You're an imbecile. Have you read that stuff?"

"Yes, sir."

"What does it say?"

"Why, it says that no man is entitled to any more than he can use himself."

"Well, have you any more than you can use yourself, Higgins?"

"No, sir."

"Then, what the devil are *you* worrying about? What else does it say?"

"It says that the men of this generation should be willing to endure hardships in order to bring about perfect conditions for the next generation."

"Oh, I see," said Bannington. "Well, aren't you enduring all the hardships you want?"

"Yes, sir, of course, sir; but it means that we should be willing to fight for our rights."

"Fight! Fight for your rights? When do you expect to begin?"

"I don't think it actually means to fight, but to learn how to vote."

"Well, if present conditions continue until *you* learn how to vote, that is plenty for me." Bannington's voice had a shade more grimness this time, and he snapped out the next question: "Have you been sitting down where you had no right to?"

"Only for a moment, sir," answered Higgins, backing a step. "This book says that no man is entitled to any more property than he can use himself, and as you were not using that big—"

"And I am not using this book, either!" exclaimed Bannington, picking up a copy of poems which lay on the center-table. Higgins dodged and the book flew over his head. "And I am not using my cane, either," he continued ferociously, but Higgins was already in full retreat toward the dining-room.

"Oh, this is glorious!" said Bannington, wiping his brow. His voice was still bitter, but there was a twinkle in his eyes. He was supposed to be a man with only one trait, only one emotion, only one purpose; but the truth was, that one would have to drill through a great many strata before reaching the bedrock of old Bannington himself.

"How glad I am that my beloved nephew has received an education!" he continued satirically. "How very cheerfully I shall welcome that university committee which has an appointment with me to-morrow!

They will not receive a check, merely—they will receive a full stop."

He walked over to the pier glass and surveyed himself in silence. The reflection showed a man above medium height, of massive build, with the eyes of an eagle flashing out from beneath heavy, overhanging eyebrows, a wide mouth and a heavy chin. Bannington surveyed his image seriously for several seconds, and then a grin stole across his grim features and he clenched his fists and shrugged his shoulders.

"I suppose," he said to his reflection, "that there is no possible way to avoid it—once a fighting man, always a fighting man—and there's a blamed good fight in me yet."

A queer, wistful expression next came to his eyes, and as he continued to look into the mirror, his mouth relaxed and he became even a little tender. "And the boy has fighting blood, too," he said. "He's a Bannington, he's a Bannington to the core, and I want him to fight with me." His lips hardened once more and his eyes took on dogged determination. "He has to fight with me."

Bannington turned and started toward the hall, but before he reached the door Claude Lorrain, the count who had thrown aside his patrimony, sauntered through it, arrayed in perfectly fitting evening clothes. The two men looked each other steadily in the eyes.

CHAPTER VIII

UNCLE RICHARD PICKS THE PATH

IT was seldom, indeed, that Claude Lorrain was flustered and although he perceived that Mr. Bannington was still agitated over some recent occurrence, he displayed no embarrassment. "Good evening, Mr. Bannington," he said easily. "You seem warm."

"I am warm," snapped Mr. Bannington, who never permitted pleasant manners to mollify him before he had enjoyed to the full the luxury of being thoroughly aroused. "Where is my nephew?"

"I have not seen him for some time. He took his dog for a walk."

"No wonder they get along well together. They take the same practical view of life. Are you an anarchist, too?"

"Oh, my dear Mr. Bannington!" laughed Lorrain, as if replying to a pleasantry. "Of course I take a deep interest in the modern trend, but I trust I am not unreasonable."

"Then you have a marked advantage over my nephew. All his life he has been exercising and developing and training every part of his make-up except his reason. He's about as stable and trustworthy as a toy balloon."

"Oh, no, not so bad as that; although I must admit

that at times his enthusiasm impels him to yield too hastily to the natural instincts of his warm heart."

Bannington drew down the corners of his mouth and looked at his guest critically. "Yes, I can easily believe you," he said dryly. "How did he happen to meet you and your friends?"

"We met in Paris. Our mutual interest in modern sociology was the magnet which drew us together."

At this juncture Emil and Ivan entered. They did not wear evening dress: Emil continued to wear the same impossible brown suit, covered with tobacco ashes and with the pockets bulging with newspaper clippings and government reports. His bristly hair had been brushed to its most aggressive angle, his broad-toed shoes had been polished, but he had made no other preparations for dinner. Ivan's dark hair had been carefully parted in the middle and his face bore the peculiar sheen which a strenuous use of soap imparts, but he also wore the same clothes in which he had arrived. The suit was a dingy black, the coat too long in the body and too short in the sleeves, the trousers too tight, but so long that they wrinkled grotesquely.

Bannington possessed a dress-suit which he had owned twenty years and worn half that many times but it was one of his inconsistencies to like to have Dick dress for dinner. He gave the two men a nod and asked Lorrain: "And do you believe that all the wealth should be divided equally?"

"Heavens, no!" replied Lorrain. "I am perfectly aware that after we become fully enlightened, each

year's production will be divided equally; but the change from one system to another must, perforce, be long and tedious. I am not one of those who think that all that is necessary to turn this crude old world into a blooming paradise is to hand its control over to the infallible guidance of the inspired labor leaders."

"Yes, but in time it will be turned over to them," said Ivan fervently. Lorrain's voice was even and musical. He always spoke slowly enough to give each word its proper terminal, which served to add to his cynical attitude. Ivan's voice was high-pitched and inclined to vibrate with passion. The effect was not artistic. "It will be turned over to them," he repeated. "It is inevitable—past history indicates it, present conditions remove all possibility for doubt, and every opening vista of the future discloses it in all its radiant splendor. There is no use—"

"You're the one," interrupted Bannington, who had been studying him closely. "You're the very one. You're the source of all this natural-gas eloquence which burst forth from my fool nephew this morning. 'Every opening vista of the future discloses it in all its radiant splendor.' Oh, that is Dick, all right—that is exactly the kind of trail that he is trying to leave. 'Radiant splendor!' Yes, Dick's enthusiasm would hand that out and then hug itself for two hours. Well, you take it from me that Dick is going into the future as a man steps out of a second story window and lights on the top of his head. He'll see all the radiant splendor he can stand—oh, yes, he'll see stars enough to furnish him with open vistas for the rest of time."

"It is easy enough for a man to talk satire," said Emil, holding up a pudgy finger. Emil's voice was guttural and heavy, he rolled his r's and interchanged his t's and d's to a large degree; but his facial expressions drew all attention from his articulation. The pupils of his eyes were small and he had the power of opening his lids until the pupils appeared to be little globes floating in a milky sky. He pursed up his lids, he twisted his head from side to side, and each time that he made what he conceded to be a point, he would seek to illustrate it and clench it by an appropriate facial expression. He also used gestures freely, especially that of prodding at his listener's face with his forefinger, as though he would calk home his arguments after the manner of a ship's carpenter.

"Satire," he continued candidly, "is the makeshift of the man who has been successful in one direction, but who has not broadened himself by a complete course of general study. Now carefully the conditions in your own country weigh. The two old parties formerly represented fixed principles opposed to each other diametrically. Now, to-day, the principles are like unto the counters in a store, while the real wares of the parties are cunningly designed doctrines, thrown on the counters like holiday novelties, and made simply votes to catch—and they are much alike—and they are all diluted imitations of socialism. Take, too, the vote. In eighteen seventy-two the population of the United States was thirty-nine million, three hundred seventy-four thousand, the Republican vote was three million, five hundred—"

"What does all this amount to, anyway?" broke in Bannington brusely. He was too much an American to resist the fascination of argument. "Governments are no longer political, they are commercial. Political orations, like graduation essays, are beautiful; but they are not business. You seem to possess some knowledge without having the judgment to use it. We find it advisable to retain the forms of political government in order to give the masses a sort of show—they like a show, you know—and we make them believe that the vote is a wonderful thing. It attracts their attention and tickles their conceit; but you must not think that we should be fools enough to hand over the really important affairs of this country to a lot of incompetents, elected by the whims and prejudices of unregulated ignorance. Not on your life! What we need is good, practical, reliable, business government; and—"

"What we need even more than this is some decent servants in this household!" exclaimed Dick, who had hastily entered in time to hear his uncle's closing remark. "It took me half an hour to get enough warm water to shave with, and the way Mulligan has been abused while I was away is nothing short of a crime."

"Yes," replied Bannington, who noted that his nephew was not in evening dress, "and you come back more idiotic than ever, and the very first day you give them enough fairy tales to scramble what little brains they already had. Confound you, I have spent considerable time making these servants over to suit myself, and I wish that you—"

"Oh, that's all right," said Dick reassuringly. "I've

fixed all that. I've had a little talk with them and they see now that it is wrong to apply great sociological truths in a narrow, domestic manner—I had to shake Higgins a little. He's as literal as a time-table. The cook had decided to dispense with dinner and give a plain, wholesome supper, but I have arranged all that. Dinner will probably be a little late, but that will give us a chance to rub up our acquaintance a little, Uncle mine."

Richard Bannington could not resist the boy. He kept his eyes on him as he spoke, and when he had finished, said: "Yes, Dick, I do want to have a talk with you. I wonder if—"

"Surest thing in the world," replied Dick, catching his uncle's meaning. "Boys, you trot along up to the billiard-hall—or you can stay here and we shall."

"Certainly," answered Lorrain. "We can perfectly understand your desire to be alone; *au revoir*."

As soon as the guests had left the room Bannington put his hand on Dick's shoulder and said in a friendly, quizzical tone: "Dick, you always were an odd little chap. You always did object to law; but after all, you generally managed to come around and do the right thing in your own fashion. How long is it going to take for this nonsense to wear off?"

"This is not nonsense, Uncle," answered Dick soberly, "and it never will wear off. I am enlisted in the cause of suffering humanity—"

"Now cut that out with me! I have had my fill of the gorgeous vistas of the radiant future, and all that rot. They are your guests, Dick, but if they should

attempt to escape, I should not use force to detain them. Dick, the Bannington plant is in a hard way. Are you going to pitch in and help; or are you going to let it go?"

"I don't like to seem ungrateful," answered Dick slowly and seriously, "but I feel that I must do my best to save the common people."

"Well, save them—save all you want of them," snapped the old man. "Do you think that I want to do away with them? Do you think that I do not know that they are just as necessary as any other raw material? That is the trouble with you open-mouthed reformers; you haven't business sense enough to see that it is economical to keep the workman at his best—and a successful manufacturer never overlooks economy." Richard paused and looked sharply at his nephew for a moment before continuing sarcastically, "When a workman is so feeble from lack of nourishment, Dick, that he can barely totter around, he don't turn out enough stuff, and that's the chief end of industry. To be perfectly frank with you, not one of our workmen has starved to death for a great number of years."

"Still, a man has other needs—" began Dick, but his uncle stopped him with a gesture of disgust.

"Oh, Dick, kindly spare me!" he said. "I know all that. And I have other needs and even you have other needs; but I'll tell you once and for all, that the needs of my business—the old Bannington Steel Plant—come before everything else in the world with me, and I'm willing to fight for it."

"What is wrong with it?" asked Dick with increasing gravity.

"Burton," growled the old man, "Burton is wrong with it. Twice I've had him whipped, clear beaten, down and out, and both times some fool relation died and left him enough to come back at me. He is all business, Dick, I'll say that for him. When he wants a good man he is willing to pay for him—advertiser, salesman, judge or legislator—if he wants him he pays the price, and it's tough competition. Talk about war being hell! Why, it's a game of ball beside business! You fix for a battle; when that is fought you know where you are, but in business you never know where you are. Day and night, night and day, you have to watch it, watch it, watch it; and Dick, I'm getting old."

Dick remained silent while his eyes followed the line of molding which ran below the ceiling. It was apparent that he was thinking deeply, and that his uncle's words were making a strong impression.

"You half-baked theorists talk about the master-class as though it were some giant with a club in his right hand, and a horn of plenty in his left; but that's not the way it works out. Some of our interests are mutual, but we're individualists, and each little individual is putting up his own little individual fight. You're big enough and strong enough to put up a good fight, my boy. We need all the Bannington blood to protect the Bannington plant. You're not going back on your blood, are you, Dick?"

The boy's eyes fell to the carpet, and he made no reply. The night sounds drifted in from the park,

chirp and twitter and buzz; and they brought with them the twilight mixture of loneliness and home-feeling. The evening dews loosed the evening scents and they floated in and aroused the old memories. Scenes of carnage and violence do not mark the real struggles; all the battles of life take place within the human soul—and still the boy's eyes rested on the carpet, and still he sat in silence.

CHAPTER IX

DICK VETOES THE CHOICE

BANNINGTON seated himself and Dick rose and began to pace to and fro. "I see your position," he said at last. "I see it exactly and I appreciate it, and I want to come in and help you fight, too—that is, part of me does; but there is the other side, also, the bigger side, the side that would mean a sacrifice of the present in order that the future may never again hear the hunger call." He paused and a whimsical expression came on his grave face. "But I always supposed that there was no end to our money, I always looked on you as one of the most shining successes of the capitalistic system. Why, it would take half the fun out of it, Uncle, to think that instead of your weltering in lucre, you were straining every nerve to keep the old boat afloat. I can't see into it: here I've been reading of your gifts, and I—"

"Burton again," snapped the uncle. "Every time he led, I followed suit—and I took the trick. If he gave away a church, I gave a hospital; if he shaded a price, I cut it to the quick; if he took away my best man, I took the next best, trained him up until he was better than the first, and beat him at his own game. Oh, I've fought him, Dick, I certainly have fought him, but he has the most capital. He don't know it, but he has.

He watered his stock when times were booming, I wanted to keep ours as close as possible, and yet branch out, too. Now, I haven't the nerve to reach out for new capital. A stumble at this point and the whole jig is up."

"I always supposed there was a merger between you and that all this scrapping was merely a bluff. Why don't you merge?"

The old man fidgeted nervously in his chair, wiped his forehead with a very large white silk handkerchief, and after a minute asked: "What will you have to drink, Dick?"

"I think I'll take a Manhattan to make sure that I'm back home again," replied Dick, glancing curiously at his uncle as he turned and touched the bell. Almost as soon as the bell had ceased to vibrate the butler entered, his face wrinkled into an attempt to depict penitence, hope and trepidation.

Bannington glared at him fiercely until he again looked like a scared rabbit, and then said courteously: "Higgins, two of your universal brothers feel the need of a little stimulant. Will you kindly oblige Mr. Dick with a Manhattan cocktail, and myself with some straight whisky, and"—suddenly changing his voice—"be damn quick about it, too."

Higgins hurried away with a sigh of relief. He knew that there were several jerks still in store for him; but that, to a large extent, his rebellion had been forgiven. Bannington examined his finger-nails intently as if to assure himself that they were in no danger of falling out, and finally said: "To tell you the

truth, Dick, that is just what I hoped that you might bring about."

"I bring about?" exclaimed Dick. "Why, Great Scott, Uncle, I have no more idea of how a merger is merged than of how an air-ship is aired. I always supposed that—well, to be perfectly frank, I never thought much about how they were actually made. I first condemned trusts in a way to make them shake in their shoes, then I was surprised to discover that they were the grandest achievement in commercialism, and would continue until something still better came along. I know all about them, and their habits and their destiny; but hanged if I have any idea how to make one."

Higgins entered and the two men raised their glasses and drank in silence. Bannington motioned the butler away and after he had gone, placed his finger on his lips and winked at Dick. Dick was surprised to see his uncle next tiptoe to the door and hear him say in tones of solicitous kindness: "It is not necessary to wait, Higgins. If I need you, I'll ring the bell"—again a quick change of voice—"and if I catch you listening again, I'll wring your neck."

"Confound you, Dick," after he had returned and taken his seat, "two days ago that creature was a perfect servant. He had no more humanity about him than an electric bell; now he has begun to think for himself, and I can never trust him again. Dick, I wish you would make up your mind on this merger business. Think it over, anyway."

"But, Uncle, I have absolutely nothing to focus on.

Have you ever tried to effect a merger? What am I to plan for?"

"Oh, Dick, you are a sad disappointment to me," said the old man, shaking his head. "I can't tell you my reasons; but—there can never be any relations between Burton and myself. We must fight it out until one or the other goes under. Not even for the plant could I make a friendly proposal to him; but you—you have no personal feelings in the matter, and you could bring it about. He is just as tired of the fight as I am; but also just as proud."

"That's all right," assented Dick. "I'm not afraid of getting turned down hard, or anything of that kind; and it's part of my philosophy to encourage trusts as much as possible. Just put me wise to the project and I'll make a noise like a corporation senator; but you see, I don't know a blame thing about the business. What kind of a talk could I possibly put up?"

"I didn't want you to put up any kind of a talk, yourself. I wanted you to be drawn into it; and I meant to oppose it at first and then to give in with every sign of reluctance. I'm weary of war, Dick. I have downtrodden my fellow creatures until my feet are sore; and I intended to retire the minute you caught the swing, and I wanted this merger to be my excuse. I've had the harness on a long time, boy, a long time."

"Well, of course I may be forced into the harness against my will; but for the life of me, I can't understand what you are talking about. You say you want to be forced into doing what you want to do anyway, and that I am mixed up in it. You'll have to forego the

Greek oracle style and talk to me as though I were a truly child. What is your plan, and what can I do?"

"Well, Dick, I hoped—I hoped that you would fall in love with Miss Burton—"

"Miss Burton!" ejaculated Dick.

"Yes," responded Bannington, feeling his spirit gather firmness at the opposition in Dick's tone. "I knew that her father would oppose it bitterly on his side, I intended to on mine, and this would naturally make you all the more determined to be married—"

"Married!" exclaimed Dick. "Good Lord, Uncle; I should rather die than marry her. It's the most preposterous thing I ever heard of. You have more romance about you than a school-girl."

"Romance!" snorted his uncle. "There is no more romance about me than about the multiplication table. I knew it would spoil everything if I had to tell you about it. I have never seen her; but I've heard that she is beautiful and accomplished. I know that her mother was a beautiful girl. From what I've seen of you, I should have had sense enough to warn you against having anything to do with her—that is just what I had my mind all made up to do, but you fooled me into telling you. A man has to be sentimental at your age and it seems horrible to him to think of putting anything that smacks of business or horse sense into his love affairs. She is a lovely girl, no doubt, and—"

"This is utterly out of the question, so you may as well forget it," interposed Dick. "I am willing to slay old man Burton, or do anything else that's reasonable; but I could never think of marrying that—now I'm not

putting my taste against yours ; but really her—her particular style of beauty does not appeal to me at all.”

“That is just like you,” retorted Bannington, “you are so accustomed to judging things that you know nothing about that you condemn a girl just because I say that it is policy to marry her. Wait until you have seen her.”

“I have seen her,” answered Dick.

“Where?”

“Right here on our grounds.”

“What? On our grounds! What was she doing on our grounds?”

“She came to find—that is, she was walking there.”

“Walking on my grounds! A Burton walking on my grounds! I’ll have a high board fence put up between us ; I’ll hire keepers to arrest trespassers ; I’ll—”

“This would certainly be a lovely home to bring my bride to, if I did marry Miss Burton,” said Dick sarcastically. “I don’t see what the deuce you want with that high board fence and those keepers, though—she did not harm the grass any.”

“I’ll not put up with it. Burton just moved out here to spite me. I’ll start that fence to-morrow.”

“Well, I want you to give orders to those keepers,” said Dick who knew that his uncle was a man of his word, “not to interfere at all with any girls who come here to walk—that is, young ladies, you know—with dogs.”

Bannington looked sharply at his nephew. “Did Miss Burton have a dog?” he asked.

“Good gracious, no. I am in favor of keeping her

out; but I mean good-looking girls, you understand—that is, my kind of good looks.”

“Have any such been walking on these grounds?” asked Bannington innocently.

“I think I did see one to-day,” answered Dick, flicking a speck of dust off his sleeve.

“My grounds are my own, and they are private,” said the other with emphasis. “I gave two parks to this town—what does it expect? What kind of girl was this?”

“Why, she was a—a poor girl.”

Bannington sat up with a jerk and glared at his nephew. “A poor girl, huh? You are a true reformer, all right; you have all the symptoms! Now, I want you to understand right here that I have a limit. You don’t turn my grounds into a private park for poor girls to walk in while you chaperone them. I am old-fashioned, and the first talk I hear about your getting mixed up in this new-fangled affinity nonsense, that very minute I put you in your right place. I hold the power to make a pauper of you, do you understand?”

“No,” replied Dick calmly, “I don’t understand; but I don’t care if you do. Then there will be no earthly reason for me to bother with business, and I can give all my time to the education of the masses.”

“Indeed, you can,” retorted his uncle sarcastically, “and I suppose you would begin by hunting up some one to support you—as did the three tramps you brought home with you.”

Dick immediately stiffened. “I fancy I should experience little difficulty in earning my own living.”

"Oh, certainly; a young fellow used to ten thousand a year always imagines that he is worth it. You couldn't earn—really earn—ten dollars a week."

"And another thing," continued Dick, "I always supposed that this house and my income were my own."

"When you get a little older," replied his uncle dryly, "you'll stop supposing and take a deeper interest in getting the facts. I have actual control until you are twenty-five, and if you go too far, I'll ditch the whole thing and make you a pauper. Now, I want to know whether or not you intend to work under my direction."

"Yes, I'll work under your direction, if you will let me choose the job."

The old man's face cleared, his nephew had enough sense after all to see when he had lost the game. "Well, what do you want to start in as? Superintendent?"

"No," answered Dick demurely, "I want to be the keeper who watches the high board fence."

Bannington rose to his feet, the veins in his forehead swelling with wrath. "You young scoundrel, you!" he roared. "You have neither sense nor decency; but you'll learn. Oh, you'll learn, all right. Just wait until I get through with you and you'll stop flapping your wings and begin to whine like a kicked cur."

Dick's face turned red. "Look here, Uncle," he said in a low tone, "you can't bluff me. I'm not afraid of poverty, I'm not sentimental about the Bannington plant; but I do get a lot of enjoyment out of life itself and I don't propose to give that up. If you are the big stem here and I am not welcome unless I shake when

you have a chill, why, you might as well rub my name off the list at once; but you may as well understand right here at the scratch that while I am always open to conviction, that is the only thing I am open to. I don't propose to give up—"

"Open to conviction?" sneered the old man. "You are too infernally obstinate to be open to anything except some idiotic nonsense. I don't see where you got all this obstinacy from! But I can tell you right here that it is not going to be popular with me. I have tried to reason patiently with you; but I'm sick of it. Now, I'll give you ten days—just ten days more in which to get your eyes open. After that, if you don't marry Miss Burton against my will—"

"You might as well call the deal off at once. I'll never marry her—never. Me obstinate? Why an army mule is a vacillating weather-cock beside you! You pick out one single, diabolical plan, and because I am too human to yield to it, you fly off at a tangent. I have offered to do everything that is possible to a man of feeling; but I tell you once for all, I shall not marry Miss Burton."

"I have given you ten days," said his uncle stiffly. "For that period you may conduct yourself just as you please; but if after that time you are still too obstinate to agree to my wishes, I shall consider you a renegade, and a traitor to your class, to me, and to the memory of your father. He founded the Bannington Steel Plant; it stands as his monument, and if you desert it, you dishonor his memory. This settles it as far as I am concerned."

As the old man spoke his temper left him and when he finished, his voice was trembling with real feeling. Dick was hurt and his voice rang with protest as he answered: "You have no right to make such a statement. It is the work of a bully; but I am not coward enough to be your tool. You have browbeaten men so often that you have lost your power to reason—you simply batter down; but you can not batter me down. I shall devote myself to a broader cause than you can conceive and if *you* tear down the monument which my father raised to himself, I shall raise him a better one, and one which will not be torn down as long as man remembers."

"And that will be about fifteen minutes," retorted Bannington. "Well, at least we understand each other."

"Yes, we understand each other."

"Now, don't be a welcher," said the old man grimly. "I have given you fair warning. You know me—I am not accustomed to half-way measures; and I am prepared to—"

"Dinner is served, sir," intruded the contrite voice of Higgins, the butler.

"Well, what are you prepared to do?" demanded Dick, ignoring the interruption.

"I am prepared to eat my dinner," said Bannington, stalking off to the dining-room.

"Higgins, tell my friends that dinner is served, and conduct them to it. They are in the billiard-room. And, Higgins, don't be bluffed so easily. You are a man. Study those pamphlets and make sure of them, and then insist upon getting your rights."

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"Yes, sir," answered Higgins anxiously as he started on his errand.

"But, Higgins," called Dick, "don't be too overbearing with it at first—especially with my uncle. He is a man of strong convictions, and they are not sympathetic."

The butler opened his mouth as if to reply, changed his mind, and bowed after the manner of one whose emotions are far beyond his powers of expression.

It was now Dick's turn to survey himself in the pier-glass. At first his face was heavily lined and serious; but after a moment an old-time grin came on it. "It looks to me as though another air-ship had come to earth," he said in a droll voice, much like that of his uncle. "This has been a ripping old home-coming and that's no joke. When did I arrive? Great Scott, not this morning! Well, at least there seems to be little risk of ennui. I shall not marry Miss Burton; but if possible I shall marry into the family. Poor old uncle—he's as narrow-minded as an epigram. But he is up against the real thing this trip, and I shall— But the first thing to do is to go in to dinner. I certainly do feel the need of a little nourishment."

He put his hands into his pockets boyishly as he started for the door, and, in spite of his revolutionary ambitions, his tanned face with its frank, open expression, now that the reaction had come and gone with the usual speed of young emotions, would have proved effective in gaining most of the favors which the foolish, sentimental old world has to grant.

CHAPTER X

A ROUGH BIT OF ROAD

WHEN Dick arrived at the dinner table, he found his guests already seated in the midst of a silence which was far from soothing. His uncle sat at the head of the table looking like the reincarnation of a thunder cloud, the count was toying with a spoon on which his gaze was concentrated. His eyebrows were raised, and his smile seemed a personal taunt to Dick.

Dick took his seat rather noisily and said heartily: "There is nothing so conducive to good digestion as a liberal mixture of conversation with the food. I have often thought that the reason our ancestors were able to abuse their stomachs as carelessly and as constantly as they did, was because they were a cheerful, social lot, and never let their business intrude on their pleasures, one of the most important of which was eating."

The butler placed the soup and the other diners gave it their entire attention.

"It would be helpful to know," continued Dick courageously, "whether or not man enjoys life as much as some of the other animals. Our appetites were given to us as guides, but we have overcome them and made slaves of them for the most part. Of course in some cases they are too powerful to surrender and very often their rebellion is successful and we become slaves of

them. Any system which attempts to run with master and slave is doomed—even the human system. All our suffering, our failures, and our vices are due to a refusal to live democratically with our appetites and desires. We no longer feel actual hunger, but a cultivated desire for some artificial blending of unnatural flavors. It is the same with the rest of our appetites.”

The butler took the empty soup plates away.

“To be sure, the brutes do not really converse at their meals,” resumed Dick, as though he were holding his listeners spellbound, “but at the same time they make noises to indicate that the exercise is a pleasant one. It is extremely agreeable to hear a stable of cows or horses eating their evening meal. Especially is this true of a military stable after the horses have been vigorously exercised, rubbed down, freshly bedded, and newly fed—the cheerful crunching, the soft sighs of contentment, the rustling of the hay just for the fun of hearing it rustle. And then take a kennel of dogs, the growling and grunting is not of ill humor, but is merely their distinctive method of expressing approval.”

The butler brought in and distributed the fish. He walked without making the slightest sound.

“The cat wishes to display the mouse before she devours it, or if she is spreading a feast for her kittens she makes a peculiar throaty gurgle to instil into their young minds the virtue of encouraging the appetites; but man is never content to make a pact with nature. Appetites are originally natural, therefore they must be remodeled. The imperious in man’s character causes him untold pain. It would be much easier to coöperate

with nature than completely to overcome her; but man is unable to see it. He is not content to rule the earth as a species, nor even as a race; he must rule it as an individual. He tries to cut himself loose from his fellows, he tries to cut himself loose from nature itself, and struggle up, up, up to where he will have dominion over all other forces—and the hatred of every creature possessing the rudiments of a mind. I delight in social intercourse”—Dick’s voice was becoming more emphatic as he gradually lost patience—“but if fate ordains that I eat in the midst of four mummies and a mechanical toy, I can stand it just as long as they can, longer, for at least I shall have something pleasant to think about.”

The butler noiselessly removed the fish plates, and the meal continued in moody silence.

At last the coffee was brought and Bannington cleared his throat twice and asked abruptly: “What are you going to do to celebrate the Fourth of July? Tomorrow is the Fourth.”

Dick stirred his coffee without noticing the remark and his uncle’s face began to burn. “Are you my nephew, or not?” he demanded.

“That is a matter which I have never investigated,” gently replied Dick who found the opportunity irresistible, “but for the sake of argument, I am willing to concede it.”

“I asked you a question, and I expect an answer—what are you going to do to celebrate the Fourth?”

“I think I shall stroll in the park and exercise Mulligan,” answered Dick.

"A typical sample of your patriotism!" retorted Bannington. "Here you rush about shouting for freedom and independence, and yet you celebrate our national Independence Day by associating with a bulldog—which I must admit seems the society you are best adapted to."

"To which you are best adapted," corrected Dick impersonally while his uncle's teeth gritted together. "Did you ever stop to consider," continued Dick as though to an inquiring child, "that the Fourth of July is not a truly national day of independence? This entire nation did not attempt to gain independence in the American Revolution, it was only the capitalistic class which attempted, and gained, independence. The workers continued to be exploited just the same and to just the same extent."

"Oh, rot!"

"It is not rot, it is the simple truth," rejoined Dick; but before he could continue, Emil began to squirm in his seat, to rumble in his throat, and finally, raising his inevitable forefinger, he said solemnly:

"Of a truth the American Revolution most other wars resembles." Lorrain gave a despairing sigh which was half a groan, and Emil turned to him and said, "I will not upon figures touch, I will simply the short outline of a few wars sketch."

"What do we want with the short outline of a few wars?" asked Bannington testily.

"So that we can the better understand why was the American Revolution," answered Emil respectfully and seriously. As there was no active protest, Emil

straightened in his chair and asked with accusing abruptness: "What happened in India?" Nothing could have been less in the minds of his listeners, and the only response was a shifting in the chairs. "I will tell you: just what has always happened when robbery was planned on a large scale. The East India Company was at first nothing but a gang of licensed pirates; but they saw that in order the surplus products of labor to seize, first must they grab the government. You see? Always the government must be owned by the big robbers, always has it been; now, still is it. When Lord Clive was tried for stealing a few tons of rupees for himself, what cleared him? The fact that he a patriot was, and that he had not stolen all there was to steal.

"Again, what about the Boer War? Were the Boers simple-hearted patriots, and the British tyrannical conquerors? Not so; they fought to see which set of capitalists should exploit the men who work in the gold mines of the Rand and in the diamond fields of Kimberly. The man behind the gun, he is also behind the times, many, many years. He knows how to aim, but not why.

"Again, take one little look at your war with Spain. Was it because Spain was cruel? Oh, that is to laugh! Russia can thousands persecute, but you talk not war with Russia. One day it will be known that because Cuba sugar raised, the great United States went to war for her. Now the people did not know, the people are patriots—and dupes. They know not even how it is that the opinions which they call their own are injected into them with shrewd and secret skill. The poor

boys who were killed by Spanish bullets and American meat supposed they were dying for their flag. This is why it is not all funny to climb up high and look down at a war.

“Because freemen work cheaper than chattel slaves, and because the men in the North saw a chance to make money in the South, was why what is the Civil War called, was fought; but we shall now turn to the American Revolution. Everybody knows that the fathers of the Revolution were smugglers and land-thieves, and that they were held back from grabbing more by the capitalists of England who owned the government. All commerce had to be on ships built in England carried, they could not anything manufacture which could in England be manufactured, all their best products must to England be sold, in Maine all trees over two feet in diameter must for the royal navy be saved, everywhere no sooner was a chance found to get a profit from the toilers, than it was grabbed away to England. Of course, this no difference made to the toilers who were getting just a living, could get no less and would get no more; but how easy to fool them it was.

“Patriotism, bloodshed, war! Always men who are weary of toiling like slaves will go out and fight like savages. All they get is the fight, not the spoils, and so they fight the harder. They all felt angry about the stamp acts—what to do with stamps had working-men? They had no contracts, they had no documents; but they got more angry than any one else. Also about the tea. Tea was a luxury, working-men did not have it much, the men who the declaration signed made money

smuggling in the tea. They wished the tax to be as high as possible. The East India Company had millions of pounds of tea they could not sell; they had ships of it in Boston Harbor, they had the tax removed. What then? Then they could their tea for a lower price than the smugglers sell. Patriotism, where is patriotism? The smugglers aroused the people to become Indians and the tea was dumped overboard.

"And yet," said Emil softly, for him, "there are patriots, there are men who rise above economic influence. We do not often in history read of them until many years after they have passed on; but they are like gods, they are above the criticism, the jealousy, and the hatred of their fellows. Such a one was Tom Paine. Of his small fortune, he gave all, of his great head, he gave all, of his tender heart, he gave all, and yet if they could erase his name from the roll of honor they would at once do it. I shall now tell to you what he did for one thing: he wrote a pamphlet called *Common Sense*. I shall now about *Common Sense* explain."

"Common sense!" ejaculated Bannington, who had reached his limit of patience. "There isn't enough common sense in the four of you to do one child a day!" And he stamped out of the room and into his office.

Emil looked after him wonderingly. "Tom Paine was a great man," he said thoughtfully. "He said, 'Where liberty is not, there is my country,' and he meant it. Did he not to France go and did he not prove that she was his country by fighting for her? Tom Paine I admire, but scarcely can I understand him. He

was above economic determinism; there is, then, no motives left to explain the actions of such a man."

"I believe that Mr. Bannington is right," said Lorrain disdainfully. "Common sense is getting to be a scarce article with us. He is the head of this house and has a right to consideration. First, Dick comes and speaks a monologue about eating, which would take away the appetite of a pig, and then Emil preaches about war until he becomes the just excuse for one."

"My uncle is a kind-hearted man, but very irascible," explained Dick, half in defense and half in condemnation, "but you must not feel that you are any the less welcome. This is your home as long as you wish to stay and the very fact that he does just as he pleases, is meant that he also extends to you the right to do just as you please."

"Never will he become a socialist," said Ivan sagely.

"No," assented Dick, "he has belonged to the master class for so many years that he can no longer sympathize with the men whose actual toil produces all the wealth."

At this juncture, the self-respecting tread of Mr. Bannington was heard approaching. "I want to ask you," he said, looking at Dick, "if your own forebears were aristocrats or laboring men? Was your grandfather born with a silver spoon in his mouth, or did he go into the West as a pioneer and hew a farm out of the rugged forest? Did your father sit around and wail because there was no longer any opportunity for a young man, or did he come back into the East and establish the Bannington Steel Plant? You, you are the

only one of the line for generations who has not been forced to begin working before he had his growth; and yet you are the only one who has thrown up his hands in despair because there was no more opportunity for a young man."

"That is because I am the only one who has had the leisure to learn how to think," replied Dick calmly. "You can work a colt so hard that he will be too stupid to kick; but—"

Bannington whirled about, clenched his fist, struck a short-arm jab at the empty air and stamped back to his office.

"You don't treat your uncle properly," said Lorrain. "He is an old man and you have no right to fret him so."

"You try being kind to him a while," answered Dick dryly. "You give him your arm and assist him up the steps—and then see where you land."

"I tell you," said Emil decisively, "that there is a man who thinks. He flies away in a rage and you say, he did not hear, he did not understand; but all the while he is turning things over in his mind. I tell you he is a man who thinks."

"Do you think he will ever become a socialist?" asked Ivan.

"No, nor do I ever expect to see a lion turn into a dove," answered Lorrain, "but I do like to see an elderly man get some of the respect which is due him."

"I treated him not without respect," said Emil. "Did I act as if his age prevented him from forming true conclusions? I did not. I placed before him a few

facts, and if he had but been of a patience to await my finish, I should have listened attentively to his reply."

"As well ask a man to await the finish of the glaciers," scoffed Lorrain.

"It must be confessed that my uncle holds narrow views on many subjects; but he has labored hard all his life and this explains why his character is not rounded out," said Dick.

Emil and Lorrain continued to discuss Mr. Bannington's shortcomings; but Dick fell into a reverie which had started during the fish course, and which Emil's war cloud had interrupted. He very much wished to know more about the location of his uncle's park, relative to the property of his immediate neighbors. "I think I shall take Mulligan for a stroll," he said after a few minutes' silence. "You may do whatever you wish and I shall be back shortly."

"Did any one ever before see such an establishment?" asked Lorrain derisively, as soon as Dick had closed the side door after him. "The servants are ill-trained and impertinent, the master and his nephew quarrel incessantly, and the nephew, who is supposed to be our host, leaves us to our own devices most of the time."

"I feel at home," answered Emil, helping himself to some more cheese. "It is not surprising that a youth fresh home after two years' absence would wish a few moments to himself, now and again to have."

"I suppose," said Lorrain pushing back his chair, "that any one accustomed to a lunch counter would be carried away by the grandeur of a country inn, but I

must say that I have never been entertained at such a hodgepodge of a house as this. Now, I am going up to my room to write a few letters, but later if you wish a game of billiards, I am at your disposal."

As soon as he had left Ivan glanced at Emil who had drawn another cup of coffee from the urn which still remained with the alcohol lamp burning beneath it, and said: "He can not get over the proud feeling of having been a count."

"Who, him?" asked Emil, thrusting a thumb in the direction which Lorrain had gone. "Well, many counts have I not known, but between you and me, Ivan, I don't think he ever was a count."

Ivan's earnest eyes opened wider. "Why should any man not forced to, admit that he belongs to the oppressing class?"

"Ho!" laughed Emil explosively. "Ivan, it surprises me that one man can know as little and as much as you do. You know about the causes of war, you know Machiavelli by heart and therefore can understand the underlying motives of what we call the heroes of history, but it wouldn't surprise me to see you sacrifice yourself to satisfy the whim of a friend. You have no country now, or you might even take a gun and go forth for a flag to fight. You are still nothing but a child. Don't you know that many people would rather give rich food to a count for nothing than to give bread in return for honest service? You have done all kinds of work; you have dug ditches and you have the sons of rich men for college fitted when you lived in London. I also have worked with

my hands and with my head all over the world. But did you ever hear Lorrain brag of working? He would like to be called a hero for giving up his title, but still get all that his title ever brought him. His family tree is a rotten one; I looked it up—it wasn't there."

Ivan looked solemn at this account of the peculiar trickery of Lorrain's family tree, but he shook his head. "No, I can not believe that he was never a count. He acts like one."

"Acts like one?" scoffed Emil. "You still have something of the peasant clinging to you, after all. Acts like one! One would think that being a count was as hard to hide as being a zebra. I was waited on once by a real count and for all I know I have been shaved by one."

"It must have been long ago," said Ivan, looking at his friend's tangled beard. "Is it not strange that Dick sets so much affection on a dog?"

Emil looked at Ivan and winked a long, knowing and thoroughly profound wink. "Nietzsche says, Ivan: 'Oversweet fruits the warrior liketh not. Therefore he liketh woman. Bitter is even the sweetest woman.' Dick has in him much of the warrior—but I do not deny that he is fond of that bulldog."

Ivan sat in deep study. "All women are not bitter," he said softly.

"Not to all men—at the same time," chuckled Emil.

"I was thinking of my mother," said Ivan.

"Think, then, also of your father," returned Emil. "He knew more on some subjects than you."

Ivan merely sighed. He found it necessary to sigh

frequently in order to brush away the minor irritations which were a by-product of his friendship for Emil. That a nature could be battered and abused as Ivan's had been and still retain its sweetness, its ideals, and to a large extent, its reverence, was a condition which Emil was unable to grasp. He had undergone much the same process, but the result had been entirely different. Now, he very rarely felt things; he merely thought them. He looked on individuals of his own species much as he looked on ants. It amused him to study their bustling ways, but their emotions were entirely apart from him.

"Woman's development has been so hampered by man that no matter what she has done—and I admit that some women have, through bitterness and vanity, caused much evil—yet, no matter what she has done, I could never hate her," said Ivan.

"It is just and wise to hate those who have injured you, Ivan," said Emil virtuously.

"It belongs to human nature to hate those you have injured," responded Ivan quietly.

"Tacitus invented many aphorisms you could do entirely without," rejoined Emil, kindly letting Ivan know who was more fittingly responsible for the sentiment he had just expressed. "It weakens a man to love the wicked."

"No man ever became wicked all at once," answered Ivan.

"Juvenal did not have sufficient data when he wrote that," responded Emil. "A wicked man was born a wicked man. When he first contemplates evil, when

he first considers it, when he first embraces it, are merely descending opportunities, or steps, on the same stair."

"That is nonsense," said Ivan emphatically. "You so love to break down a maxim that you care not if the truth also goes down with it. And also you think it is wonderfully smart to give the name of an authority who has also uttered the same sentiment that another speaks. For me, I am always willing to concede the truth gladly, when it is the truth."

"The concessions of the weak are the concessions of fear," replied Emil placidly.

"Edmund Burke, Edmund Burke, Edmund Burke!" cried Ivan finally, losing patience, rising to his feet and hurling the name into Emil's very face. Then he turned and strode out of the room and up to his bed-chamber.

"A little thing seems great to a little man," said Emil thoughtfully, as he drew another cup of coffee, helped himself to a bit of cheese, and settled himself more comfortably in his comfortable chair. After eating his bit of cheese he lighted a large cigar and sat dreamily smoking and sipping the black coffee. Emil knew all the laws of diet, but he never considered their personal application. His nerves were of copper, and as he sat at ease there was not a wrinkle on his face. It was hard and smooth and kindly, like the bronze statue of a gentle god. "I will see if I can again find the book on the relation of commerce to conquest," he said at last, rising and walking into the library.

CHAPTER XI

THE GIRL AT THE WHEEL

THE next morning Dick's guests were again left to amuse themselves as best they could while he took Mulligan for a walk in the park. On the night before he had discovered that the Burton place, on the right of Bannington Park, as one entered its front gate, extended back as far as did that of his uncle's, but contained only ten acres. The Staunton place was on the left and seemed to be a little larger than the park. At least half of it was given up to pasture and garden, while the Burton place was still covered with old indigenous trees in the rear, but displayed rather artistic landscaping at the front.

Mulligan had slept soundly after his night's prowling, and was fresh and eager for any kind of adventure. Dick began at the hedge where it touched on the road and followed it carefully along the Burton boundary. Mulligan was not sure whether cats or rabbits were the game, but he industriously thrust himself into every break, and Dick gave them a still more critical examination. He found four which had evidently been used as passages, but he failed to chance on the girl with the collie. At the farthest opening Mulligan growled savagely, and Dick decided that this

one had recently been used, at least by the foreign dog.

An indistinct path led into the tangle of the park, and his thorough investigation of this consumed the rest of the morning. When he reached the house he found that Lorrain had gone to New York and that Emil and Ivan had decided to make the same trip after luncheon.

"That's a good idea," said Dick heartily.

"You will come also?" asked Ivan.

"No, not this afternoon. You see—"

"The dog," suggested Emil, "he will more exercise require."

"Yes," answered Dick, "he is a lot better already, and if I just keep him at it for a few days he will begin to shape up again."

"I would give him to a farmer," said Ivan. "On a farm he would not get too much rich food, and he would have plenty of exercise. On a farm a dog is treated like a dog, not like a prince, and it would do him good."

"You already know some of the socialists of New York," said Dick, seeing no hope of making his attitude toward Mulligan appear rational to Ivan, or sincere to Emil, "and they will make you known to the other leaders. You must come and go and do just as you like until I get through with a few private matters, and then we shall open our campaign in earnest."

"Even so," assented Emil enigmatically.

As soon as they were gone Dick once more took Mulligan, who sniffed wistfully at the kitchen odors

floated out to him, but who was thoroughly game and optimistically hopeful that the elusive prey which had baffled them during the forenoon would now fall to their prowess. This time Dick examined the hedge between the park and the Staunton place, finding three openings, but none which aroused personal resentment on the part of his ally.

On reaching the house he found a message from his uncle saying that he would not return to dinner. The message was a statement in its simplest form and yet Dick felt that in some subtle way it also conveyed a reproach. Dick's sensitive nature responded to every shifting shade; he was disappointed at not having met the girl with the collie, he was depressed by the absence of his uncle, and he ate a cheerless meal.

He tried to draw Higgins into conversation, but found the butler too discreet to serve even as the basis for conversational recoil. Higgins was one of those careful souls, too cautious even to possess tact. He was utterly devoid of rigidity and resiliency; a remark did not rebound from him, it did not pierce him, it merely struck his outer covering of chronic anxiety as a ball would strike a feather tick, to fall after a moment with a disheartening plop.

It requires something more than contrast to produce perfect compatibility, and Dick was so incensed with the butler that he would not even ask for what he wanted, but contented himself with rapping on the table for attention and pointing with his finger, as he was in the habit of doing with Mulligan. Dick was social to the extent of preferring a quarrel to solitude,

but he found the present situation unbearable and after bolting his dinner, he hurried forth to feed the impatient bulldog.

He held the plate aloft and Mulligan sat gazing up at it adoringly while the saliva dripped from his mouth. "That's the stuff, old sport," cried Dick encouragingly. "You've burned up enough fat to-day to get a regular hunger, and it stimulates your entire being. I truly admire your positive character, Mulligan," continued Dick as he set the plate on the ground and noted the zest with which his pet proceeded to devour the contents, "and it would be a great thing for the human race if you and that fool butler could exchange souls."

Dick had eaten without dressing and the long summer twilight had scarcely begun to fall. He was restless; he paced up and down with his hands in his pockets and a frown on his face.

"You go up to my room and go to sleep, Mulligan," he said after that individual had finished licking the plate. "Exercise after a meal like that would make your heart pound like a broken piston—and I'm going to take a ride."

Mulligan's walk was slow and stately, his expression was reproachful, but he obeyed the order, and as Dick closed the door after him, his own face was lighted with a returning interest.

"How's Roland, Mike?" he asked the stableman, who had knocked the ashes from his pipe and risen to attention at his approach.

"Smooth an' oily, sir," answered the man briskly.

"Throw the saddle on him and fetch him out," said Dick.

After a few moments Mike led out a clean-built thoroughbred, and Dick picked up his feet and examined them critically. Afterward he backed off and looked the horse over carefully, his face finally showing approval. "Begins to resemble a horse again, Mike," admitted Dick, and Mike's face beamed.

Dick mounted and started off at as near a walk as he could induce Roland to follow, while the stableman stood gazing after them, nodding his head wisely.

"As for me," said Mike, filling his pipe mechanically, "give me one o' these proud young bloods what knows what they want. A man ain't nothin' but a machine to 'em, but at least they know whin the machine runs roight—an' thot's more thin some min know."

Dick trotted out of the park, turned to the right, and as soon as Roland had warmed a little he let him slip into a canter. "Better than eating your head off, eh, old chap?" he asked, patting the horse on the neck.

He continued up the smooth road, which was more like a street, until an ordinary country road forked into it. He turned down this, and by this time all his moodiness had been blown away and he took off his hat and slapping Roland with it, exclaimed: "Chase it, old boy, chase it!"

The footing was soft and tough, the horse was full of ginger, and in a second they were flying along the road with Dick's face beaming like that of a cherub triumphant. This was something like being back home again. For a few minutes he felt that he could

let the cares of the universe slip from him and drink once more from the bubbling spring of boyhood.

Suddenly Roland shied to the left and Dick instantly drew him down. As he dashed by the object which had caused the horse to shy, he saw it was a collie dog playing with a girl, and hidden from view by a clump of bushes until he was fully upon them. As soon as the horse was under control Dick returned and sat looking frankly down into the eyes of the girl. There was a glint of amusement in hers as she raised them to him. For many generations the eyes of women found pleasure in being raised to those of a man on horseback. They have not entirely outgrown it.

"Where in the world have you been lately?" asked Dick reprovingly.

Dimples appeared at the corners of her mouth. "I have been attending to my household duties," she answered demurely.

"Fudge!" responded Dick. "Don't you know that it will ruin a collie dog not to give him plenty of exercise?"

"Yes, sir," replied the girl. "That is what I am doing now."

"Why didn't you take him for a walk in the park again to-day?" asked Dick.

"How do you know I didn't?" She didn't mean to ask the question.

"Because I hunted the blooming park from one end to the other," answered Dick honestly, and then they both laughed.

"I don't think I shall walk there any more," said the girl.

"I don't think I shall, either," returned Dick.

"Why won't you?" asked the girl.

"You'll have to furnish the reason for both," responded Dick. "I don't know what it is."

"That is really a worthy horse," she said blandly. "Your choice of associates is showing a marked improvement."

"Since having met you," suggested Dick.

The smile left the girl's face. "We haven't met yet, you know," she cautioned.

"If it were not such a temptation to fly, I don't suppose you would keep your wings clipped so close," retorted Dick. "If some detestable old bore whom you can't abide, and whose judgment on the wholesomeness of a collie's drinking-water you would utterly disdain, were to tow me up to you at some crowded reception which was resting on your soul like a cloud of sulphur smoke, and mumble my name so that you could not catch a single syllable, I suppose you would admit that we had met, but because you are enjoying the outdoors with an intelligent companion, and I come along also enjoying the outdoors with an intelligent and thoroughly reliable companion, and because these two intelligent companions hold firm convictions upon certain topics and proceed to discuss them so vehemently that we, ourselves, are drawn into the whirlpool against our intentions, if not even against our wills, and after the dogs have suspended their argument temporarily, and we have discovered through

the hearing and asking of questions that we are as congenial as a bottle and a glass, why you have—”

“Of course it is silly,” interrupted the girl, who had been shaking her head negatively during this long preamble, without, however, being able to remove the furtive smile of amusement, “but it is customary, and I am sure that if it is best for us to become acquainted, we shall be properly introduced in due time, and it will be just ever so much more comfortable.”

Dick looked down thoughtfully. “I suppose that women will continue to ignore facts and jump at hasty conclusions until the end of time,” he said abstractedly.

“I did not do it this time, at least,” said the girl promptly. “I have studied over it all day.”

Dick slapped his thigh and laughed, and her face grew red. He was impertinent and provoking, and she would brook no more of him. Holding her head erect, she turned to walk away.

“But listen a moment,” he said contritely. “You can no more help being feminine than I can overcome my masculine tendencies. Your intuition would tell you that I was scouring the park all day in the hope of seeing you, and therefore it was perfectly fitting that you should consider a course of action suitable to our next meeting. Now, I have also had a few thoughts on the subject, and as long as we have met, quite by accident, let’s argue the case in a cold and entirely impersonal manner.”

The horse had finally ceased pawing and swinging, the collie had lain down with his nose on his paws,

the shadows had grown much deeper, the chirpers, the buzzers, and the twitterers had stopped listening and had begun the noisy discussion of their own affairs: all the nature people saw that it was settled that the boy and the girl were going to have their talk, but there was an anxious note in the boy's voice, and the expression on the girl's face indicated a determination to rush home the very next moment.

"My aunt is very particular as to the proprieties," said the girl.

"She's just the kind of a one who would be," said Dick resentfully, and then hastily added, "I mean that this is entirely right as a general rule, and I heartily approve of it. What I am going to suggest is the most proper course possible. Listen, the safest acquaintances are those which begin in childhood by the little boy peeking through the back fence at the little girl. We can't turn the clock back quite that far, so let's do the next best thing, let's just be regular children until we get thoroughly acquainted. It would be utterly stupid to cast back what the gods have given us, and have some commonplace third person introduce us."

"It would be fun," admitted the girl, "but I fear we should be disappointed. Such things make lovely stories for one to tell one's self while one is going to sleep, but in real life—"

"Do you do that, too?" asked Dick in surprise. "Guns, I've fought against that with prayer and fasting. I supposed it was a form of mania and bad for the mind. The only way I discovered to stop it was

to start a stiff debate on some actual subject, and take both sides."

"I should rather not have a mind at all, than to use it that way," said the girl wickedly.

"Ah, now we're getting back to our old cheerful level," said Dick contentedly. "Do you ride horse-back?"

"I used to."

"Oh, stop holding yourself back, and play like a nice little girl," reprimanded Dick. "I know a dandy hollow tree a mile from here which we can use for a post-office."

"That's nothing," said the girl. "I know of a splendid big oak at the exact corner where Mr. Bannington's place joins Mr. Burton's. There is a hollow, close to the ground, which one would scarcely notice by accident. Ever since I discovered it I have been tempted to hide a note there and see who would find it."

"I shall look there each morning," vowed Dick.

"Only once a day?" asked the girl.

"Always, I adjust myself to circumstances," he replied.

"And now I must go home," said the girl.

"How do you happen to be here on the day we desecrate?" asked Dick.

"The rest of the family have gone to see some fireworks destroyed, and up to two this afternoon I expected to go to another place to see some other fireworks destroyed, and then it suddenly became clear to me that the fragrance of the woods at twilight was

more agreeable than burning saltpeter, so I sent my regrets."

"Thank you," said Dick, and in spite of her will, and with no reason whatever, the girl was mortified to feel the color rush to her cheeks. It was now quite dark and she hoped that he had not noticed.

"I must run along home, now," she said. "See how dark it has grown, and you know that little girls are not permitted to be out late."

"The Fourth of July is always an exception," Dick pointed out convincingly. "Let's talk about whole lots of things, and when you feel that you must go home, I'll go with you."

"I must really go at once—and you must really not go with me."

A heavily built man with grimy face and wearing rough clothing slouched by. Dick eyed him narrowly; he measured his height, breadth and reach. He felt that he could master him and was a little sorry that it was not necessary to make the attempt. It did not occur to him that this might be an honest working-man, or even a member of that noble army of the unemployed, so dear to him.

"It would not be safe for you to go home alone at this hour," he said.

For answer the girl pointed to the collie which had promptly risen and was pressing against her knee, looking sharply at the retreating form of the stranger.

"May I not even ride after you at a distance?"

"You must start first, and go in the direction from

which you came—and you must start at once, and not look back.”

Dick bowed low with his hand covering his heart, tightened his reins, and rode away into the darkness. Roland was disgusted at having had the ride which had opened so promisingly, come to such a dull ending, and he retraced his steps soberly.

The girl stood in the shadow of the clump of bushes watching him. Her eyes were shining and a cheerful stimulation possessed her. After all there were still some flowers of true romance growing outside her day-dreams, and the kindly old earth was not nearly so cold and precise as she pretended to be. “Come, Bayard,” she said. “I told you that this was going to be a perfectly splendid Fourth of July, but now we must go home.” And in spite of his own ideas on a perfectly splendid Fourth of July, the dog took his position on the right side of his mistress, and they traversed the quiet country road which, all unknowingly, wound by Camelot and Arden and divers other fair spots not usually found on the maps of New Jersey.

As for Dick, he rode along humming a medley of love songs, and speaking confidentially to Roland from time to time, utterly unconscious of the latter’s sulky disapproval of the evening’s jaunt. Dick was, in reality, holding a religious service, which demands concentration and exclusion. He was offering praise to the giver of good, clean, healthy youth, and, without attempting to put it into words, returning thanks for the starlight and darkness, and appetites and desires,

and many other things which his formal philosophy classed among the constant and invariable blessings. He had forgotten all unpleasant things, including that extremely unpleasant question, when once it has taken hold of a man—the fate of the proletariat.

CHAPTER XII

A SICK UNCLE AND A SPITE FENCE

DURING the next few days Bannington Park was the storm center of many emotions. Dick was almost overworked in the attempt to give Mulligan and Roland sufficient exercise, his uncle began to suffer from acute twinges of rheumatism, and their evening discussions were of the kind which heat without convincing. Ivan chafed at what he considered sinful inaction, Emil read, ate and smoked with philosophical content, and Lorrain spent most of his time away from the house.

On the evening of the eighth of July, Dick and his uncle had an unusually personal discussion, and the next morning Dick left before breakfast, saying merely that he would be back on the thirteenth or before it. Ivan hoped that this indicated the opening of their actual campaign, and rejoiced accordingly, but Lorrain smiled derisively, and even Emil merely closed his eyes and blew a huge ring of smoke. Bannington came home early that evening, growling about the rheumatism in his foot, and the next morning he started to build the high board fence, just inside the hedge on the boundary between his own place and Burton's.

The old man could not resist the impulse to browbeat Ivan, but appeared to enjoy Emil's society. The

stolid German lived in the shadow of a serenity so great that Bannington's fiercest outbursts failed to penetrate it. Always Emil would reply candidly and calmly, and his materialism was so solid that at times it aroused the respect which Bannington generally reserved for practical things. Lorrain made two insidious attempts to pacify the old gentleman, but receiving rather curt responses, he withdrew to more agreeable society. To say the least, it was a discordant assembly which had gathered at the comfortable old house in beautiful Bannington Park.

When Mr. Burton saw preparations for building the fence, he immediately served notice that if it were not stopped at once, he would get out an injunction. Richard Bannington read the notice and grinned, but gave orders to have the part of the fence already erected torn down and the post holes filled up.

This was on the eleventh of July. On the twelfth, an army of men arrived soon after Mr. Burton had left for his New York office, and the fence was finished within two hours. Bannington's foot had become so painful that he had taken to a chair, but when the news was brought he chuckled, slapped his thigh, and, taking one thing with another, he quite successfully displayed a primitive joy in a truly primitive manner. He immediately gave strict orders to the two men whom he had retained as keepers, and settled himself in his easy chair, hoping that Burton would act as the counter-irritant to his swollen foot.

As nothing occurred the next morning to take his mind off himself, Bannington decided to have Gladys,

the maid, read to him. Emil had suggested the project, by himself volunteering, but as each paragraph had given rise to a protracted discussion, Bannington had emphatically refused a repetition of the experiment, and was now trying to adjust Gladys to his own ideas of a reader. Gladys had entered on her new task at ten o'clock. It had promised novelty and she had welcomed it, but soon discovered that it was a labor which called for fortitude rather than enthusiasm, and her temper rose as her spirits fell until at three o'clock she had reached the point where even womanly patience ceased to be a virtue.

"There—that will do of that stuff!" shouted Dick's uncle. "I don't want to go crazy." They were seated in his office which was in the west wing.

The maid looked at him indignantly while her lips worked and her fingers opened and closed vindictively, but she managed to control herself and ask: "Shall I try something else?"

"No, for Heaven's sake, no! You've been trying something else for the last century—seems like. You started with utter rot and everything you've tried since has been ten times worse than the one before it. Now, I'm done. If I'm going to die in this chair, I'm going to die in peace—or at least in quiet."

"Well, I'm sure I can't help it," retorted Gladys with equal vigor. "I've tried everything. I started out with those pamphlets of Mr. Dick, and I'm sure they're instructive; then I wanted to read the Bible, and I'm sure that would have done you good; and next I tried three new novels, but—"

"Novels!" cried Mr. Bannington. "Any account of an unfortunate fool and an idiotic but beautiful female is called a novel. Do I look like a man who would pine for novels?"

"You made me read to you. You— Goodness gracious, I hope you don't imagine that any one would fight for the privilege of reading to you! You have thrown three books into the scrap-basket and one at me, and I have stood all I can stand, and now—"

"Stop it!" cried Bannington, starting up, but sinking back and clasping his foot. "Oh, ooh, ouch—ooh! Hang the luck!"

"That's it, swear," commented the maid, who had reached the point where defiance was no longer a luxury, but an actual necessity.

"I did not—I said 'hang.'"

"Well, you meant the other, and you've already said it so often that I hardly notice it any more. You're a wicked old man! We have all done our best for you, but we get nothing in return but threats and vile names. All you can do is to discharge me and before I go, I am going to have my say."

Bannington attempted to interrupt her, but Gladys had become almost hysterical, and her voice rose to a triumphant shriek. "I tell you I am going to have my say. What do you think you are—a Chinese Mandarin? You swell yourself up with pride and think that the entire world is for you, just because you are worth millions and millions of dollars, but I tell you that you add nothing to the joy of life, but only to its sorrow. You never bring a smile, but only a tear;

and you add your weight to the already stifling load of suffering humanity. You think—”

Bannington could stand no more: he raised himself on his left elbow and grasped a medicine bottle with his right hand. “I’ll have your life,” he roared, “I’ll have your life! Confound you, I have sat still while you have blackened my dying hours, but if you say another word about suffering humanity, I’ll get up and brain you. Ain’t I a part of humanity? Haven’t my own sufferings any rights at all? You inhuman vampire—if you don’t get out of here at once—” He assumed a still more threatening attitude and the maid started for the door. “You keep out of here in the future, you understand—and send that fool butler in at once.”

The maid slammed the door and her irate master sank back in the chair, where he rested for a moment, panting. “I believe that little excitement has done me good,” he said with a grim grin. “I’ve always maintained that good health depended on nothing but good circulation, and nothing makes my blood circulate like a good scrap.”

He closed his eyes and leaned his head back for possibly thirty seconds, and then his eyes snapped open and he pounded his bell vigorously. “Where is that fool butler? Higgins—Higgins! I’ll twist his neck when he does come.”

The door opened and the butler entered decorously. Bannington glared at him. “Where have you been?”

“Why, sir,” began Higgins, “Mr. Dick—”

PAUL MEYER



"If you say another word about suffering humanity, I'll brain you"

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ASTOR, LENOX AND
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"I have told you fifty times that I am boss of this house, not Mr. Dick."

"I know that, sir. It would be 'ard for any one to boss Mr. Dick; but what I started—"

"You infernal idiot! You knew exactly what I meant. I meant that I am the boss; Mr. Dick is not. He is a hare-brained idiot! Do you intend to take orders from me in the future, or from a hare-brained idiot?"

"Yes, sir; certainly, sir."

"What? What do you mean?"

"I—I 'ardly know, sir," stammered Higgins.

"Then what the devil do you mean by trying to tell me something, when you don't know it yourself?"

"I—I; yes, sir. No, sir—" faltered Higgins.

"Oh, dry up! You make me so nervous that I can hardly see, and the doctor said I must have absolute quiet. Now, take three deep breaths and tell me why you did not come at once."

"Well, sir, Mr. Di—he had some persons to luncheon, and they—"

"Who did?"

"Mr. Dick, sir," apologized Higgins.

"The scoundrel! What kind of persons?"

"Why, some of them looked respectable, sir, but some of them looked like tramps, an' they talked 'orrid wicked about the rich. I was—"

"What! Tramps eating in my house? What in thunder do you mean by leaving them alone with the silver? Get out of here and order them out of the

house, and send my nephew here at once! Well, what are you staring at? Hurry up."

"Oh, I'll get apoplexy," moaned Bannington after Higgins had left the room. "Why in thunder did I have to have this fool rheumatic-gout just at this time? This is the last time I let Thompson doctor me. Rheumatic-gout? If my grandfather had been a wealthy man, it would be just plain gout! But plain gout's too infernally refined for a self-made man. Well, it can't hurt any worse—and that's some satisfaction."

Dick entered without visible signs of uneasiness, and, after vainly striving to make his eyes shift, his uncle demanded: "What do you mean by having a lot of tramps here?"

Dick had merely heard that the old man was suffering from an ancient and painful enemy, but this appeared to be delirium. His conscience smote him for having ignored him so long and he said soothingly: "There, there, Uncle; there are no tramps here. Just let me—"

"Here? Of course they're not here! Now, don't you dare to think that I'm out of my head. I'm as sane as I ever was in my life—though the Lord only knows how I keep so. I mean the gang you have in the dining-room."

"Great Scott, Uncle, those are not tramps. Those are a few of the leading socialists, and prominent union men whom I invited to discuss matters with a couple of interesting members of the great army of the unemployed."

"Leading socialists; prominent union men; inter-

esting members of the great army of unemployed!" repeated the uncle. "What is the reason there are no celebrated safe-blowers, conspicuous cutthroats, and illustrious street-cleaners here to do honor to our humble board? Now you fire them out of this house this very instant, do you hear?"

"I certainly do," answered Dick calmly. "There is no doubt but that you have your full share of imperfections, but a feeble and indistinct voice is not one of them. I shall not fire them out of this house this instant, or any other instant. I invited them here."

"Do you know who I am?"

"Only by hearsay," replied Dick with unshaken calmness. "The general impression is that you have the honor of being my uncle."

"Honor—yes, it is indeed an honor. You are about as useless a creature as I ever met. But what I want you to understand is, that I am still the head of this house and intend to remain so."

Bannington's voice had lost its childish petulance and had fallen to the colder tones which in themselves indicated something of menace.

"The ten days are not quite up," replied Dick, his voice in turn losing its taunting undertone and indicating deliberate determination. "I enjoy the freedom and privileges of my paternal roof a few hours longer, and one of these privileges is inviting my friends to call on me and entertaining them decently when they come. Now, you need not alarm yourself. They were on the point of leaving when Higgins told me you wished to speak to me, and as it was necessary for some

of them to catch the four o'clock train, they have undoubtedly left by this time. Furthermore, in order to put your mind entirely at ease, I shall take this occasion to inform you that I, also, intend to leave to-night."

Always their quarrels followed the same circle: they irritated each other until the underlying sturdiness of their natures became exposed; then each found something to respect in the other, and the old, familiar call of the blood cried out against breaking the ties which bound them together. Now, they maintained a somewhat awkward silence for a few moments, and then Bannington said softly: "Don't do it, boy. Your place is at the plant. I don't expect much of you at first, but I want you with me—I want some one I can talk to. I'm lonely, Dick, and that's gospel truth."

"You needn't think, Uncle, that it's going to be easy for me to turn my back on the old ways entirely, but I simply can't stand it to be run over, the way you try to run over every one."

"At least, I have never tried to run over you, Dick," argued the old man a little reproachfully. "Why, you carry on like an insane person, but I just meekly let you go your own gait."

"You are, indeed, the meek one," rejoined Dick, smiling but unshaken. "Here I asked you not to put up that idiotic fence, but what effect did it have? I go away for a few days, and when I return I find a frightful barricade with spikes on top and a couple of Hungarian outlaws on guard. That would settle it with me, even if it had not been settled already."

"I don't intend to provide promenade grounds for the Burtons," replied Bannington with emphasis.

"Puts me in a nice box, doesn't it?" pointed out Dick. "To live in a yard too sacred for our nearest neighbors to look into, and yet to preach a universal brotherhood—"

"Stop it, stop it, I say!" cried Bannington, flaring up again. "Confound it, I won't sit here and permit any living creature to beat me over the head with that word. Now, Dick, I don't want to rile you up, but you ought to use a little discretion. The truth about you, Dick, is that you have a good heart, but a fool head."

"A head is nothing but a machine—a man's heart is what counts. Your own heart is becoming ossified; then what use is your head—good though it is—to the human race?"

Bannington exploded. "The human race be—well, no, not quite that, but for Heaven's sake, Dick, keep it out of your talk until we can come to a sensible understanding. I don't want you to leave. You know, boy, that you have always found a hearty welcome here."

"Not this last time," answered Dick a little stiffly. "You treated me outrageously this last time. After wandering around the entire globe, I came back like the prodigal son—"

"Prodigal hell!" exclaimed the old man. "You came back like the fatted calf. The three tramps who are fleecing you are more like the prodigal son. They are simply working you, Dick—"

"That will do," interrupted Dick decisively. "I am willing for you to revile me, but I refuse to listen when you insult my guests."

"Oh, never mind them," said his uncle largely, "I'll give them jobs, too, the very moment you are willing to go to work. I tell you, Dick, that a year at hard work would give you a truer view of life than seven centuries spent in sitting down and studying over it. We are after a big government contract now—nobody can handle it except Burton or us—and it will give us a work-out. I have it about figured down to the roots, for we have to have it. Our credit is beginning to limp a little, and getting this contract means that we'll be able to make the grade; while losing means that we never can get over it—that the Banington Steel Plant is whipped, once and for all."

"What good will it do if you have it figured down to the roots?" asked Dick, sincerely interested.

"Well, now, Dick," replied the old man with a dry wink, "there is always a little something in the roots—but the main thing is that it will bolster up our credit. I'd give a hundred thousand dollars to know exactly what Burton's bid will be—and you might have found out, too."

"How in the world could I have found out?"

"By marrying his daughter."

"I'll never marry her," answered Dick shortly. "But if I were already married to her, I don't see what good it would do. She wouldn't know anything about the contract, and it wouldn't be fair sport for her to tell if she did."

"Fair sport," grinned the old man. "You'll find out quick enough that the steel business isn't played like foot-ball—that is, not the way you played foot-ball. I'd find out if I could. Burton would find out my bid if he could and we both know it."

"I am sorry, Uncle, but the more I learn of business, the more I dislike it."

"And the more I know of you the more hopeless I become. You act like some overgrown boy with his pockets full of money. Do you know what your income will be if you cut loose from me?"

"I don't suppose it will be anything—until I earn one for myself," answered Dick confidently.

"You'd starve to death long before that," scoffed Bannington. "You have an income of exactly nine hundred dollars from your mother—and that's all you will have."

"My poor little mother," said Dick softly. "I can't even remember her—and did she leave me an income?"

"You can call it an income if you want to," said the old man, incensed that Dick had not received the news as a blow, "but a heap of good it would do you. Nine hundred dollars! Why, you can't scrimp along on that for a month without practising the strictest economy. And you have the nerve to tell me that you are going to live on a measly, underfed stipend of nine hundred—"

Dick put his hand gently on his uncle's arm. "Never mind finishing, Uncle," he said softly. "I remember it all now. This little income of nine hundred a year was the fortune my mother brought my father—and

it was a fortune to him then. It doesn't sound very large to-day, but it was the start of the Bannington Steel Plant—and neither of us can afford to sneer at it."

A half-shamed expression came to Bannington's face, but he hardened instantly. "There was something back of it when it started the plant," he said; "brains and industry, and hard common sense."

"And I believe that I can take it and start something else," began Dick, holding himself erect, but speaking in low, even tones. "Something which will not turn me into a machine, but will keep me—"

"Then go—I've done all I can, and now I'm through with you." His uncle's voice was implacable.

"All right," replied Dick, refusing to be ruffled. "I am going to take a walk about the grounds, now. I have sent my stuff down to my new quarters; but I don't want to leave as though we had been quarreling and I'll stop in and say good-by to you before I go—if I miss you at dinner."

Dick started toward the door, stopped and looked at his uncle who sat with his brows drawn together in pain, rather than anger. For a moment the boy hesitated, and then, with a shrug, he turned the knob and stepped into the passageway.

For a full minute the old man's eyes remained sternly on the door which had closed behind his nephew, and then he drew his hand wearily across his forehead.

"I can't see what possesses the boy," he muttered. "Here I have given him the best years of my life, and

am willing to throw in the rest of it. I think of nothing but his welfare; and yet he never loses a chance to defy me. Well, let him," he continued gruffly after a pause. "Hang it, I haven't reached the stage yet where I'm going to let infants dictate to me. Confound the three loafers who led him astray!"

CHAPTER XIII

EMIL TAKES UNCLE RICHARD A SPIN

RICHARD BANNINGTON sat brooding over the splendid career which his nephew might have enjoyed if he had put him to work as soon as his college days were over instead of permitting him to fall into the clutches of the three undesirables with whom he had returned, until a knock at the door aroused him.

"Come in," he growled.

Emil and Ivan entered, bent on exemplifying the reciprocity of hospitality by comforting their host in his hour of affliction.

"Ah, Mr. Bannington," said Emil blandly, "we have been enjoying a most delightful—"

"I don't doubt it," snapped Bannington. "I don't doubt it in the least! You are exactly the kind who devote most of their lives to enjoying the most delightful things—at the expense of some one else."

"Well, really if you feel—" began Emil, but Bannington again interrupted him.

"Never you mind how I feel, I'm still able to know what I think. Did you ever stop to consider your true positions: you come over here to reform this country—the United States of America! Where did you come from? You are a natural born German and you, a natural born Russian; and you were both chased out of

your own countries into France, which isn't a country at all but a hot house where they spend their time raising things contrary to the laws of nature. I don't care what it is—religion, clothing, morals, politics, anything at all; once it goes through Paris it comes forth twisted and pulled and—”

“One moment, my dear sir,” interrupted Emil. “In a measure you are right; but you too hasty at conclusions jump. In Paris there are three hundred and thirty-one distinct religious divisions, nine political parties, each one many times subdivided, one hundred and seven philosophical societies, four hundred and nineteen—”

“Well, good heavens, what do I care?” exclaimed Bannington. “I don't own Paris, and I don't want to buy it. The worst I have against it is that it brought you and my fool nephew together. You are in a big business to spoil that boy's entire life.”

“No, not so!” said Ivan with fervor. “We have not spoiled his life, we shall not spoil his life. Now, do we give him the great opportunity of offering up his life in the cause of Br—”

Bannington clutched the arms of his chair and raised himself. “Don't you dare to say a word about brotherly love or suffering humanity. I'm not so defenseless as I appear, and hang it, I won't stand it!”

“I do not wish to offend you,” answered Ivan with simple earnestness. “I do not wish to offend any one. We never feel hatred for individuals, we never fight individuals; but always we oppose the system—the system under which both the millionaire and the tramp

are inevitable. In this fight I am rejoiced to give up my life."

Ivan paused with a look of high devotion on his face, and Bannington eyed him curiously before he replied in a more subdued tone: "Yes, you are exactly the kind of man who is always willing to die for a cause—and nine times out of ten, that is the very best work he can do for it. Now I say this in kindness. You live too high in the air. Your ideals are all right as ideals; but, hang it, you can't live up to an ideal. You can only live toward one in a conservative and practical way. Your kind of man wants to go from the ox-cart to the air-ship in one step. The safest plan is to develop the steam car and gasoline motor first."

"You are right," chimed in Emil. "The keynote of all things is evolution. Starting from the single cell, we find—"

"Now, you must excuse me," said Bannington who was surprised to find himself getting into a fairly good humor, "but I never could stand it to have evolution reduced to fractions—just at this moment. I can see your side of the question, and it is all right—for you. If you two want to go about preaching and hurling figures at people, I won't do anything to stop it. No, indeed, I'll even go further and supply the funds. All I ask is, that you leave my nephew free to do his duty in that station of life into which it has pleased God to call him."

The old man's voice had grown solemn, and Ivan's voice vibrated with feeling as he answered: "I love your nephew more than if he was my own brother. I

would never do one thing to spoil his life; and I am willing to give up my own to bring him happiness; but this cause seems the grandest thing in life to me—it does—it seems the grandest thing in life.”

“You’re honest, I admit that,” rejoined Bannington, returning the tense gaze of the zealous Russian; “but you carry too much sail for your ballast. Still, I’m going to treat you just as if you had good common sense; and this is the proposition: would it be better for your cause to have a foe or a friend, at the head of the Bannington Steel Plant with its heavy pay-roll?”

The old man spoke slowly and when he had finished, Ivan put his hand to his chin and fixed his eyes on the ceiling in silent meditation. Bannington eagerly watched the mental battle which the Russian was undergoing; but Emil could not resist an opportunity to convert the gold of silence into the less precious metal of speech.

“It is estimated,” he said impersonally, “that during the next decade, the world will sixty million tons of iron per annum consume. This means about one hundred eighty million tons of ore, as ore which does not yield more than twenty per cent. is not considered of a profitable richness to work. Now in Sweden—”

“Write the rest of it on paper, and let the man think,” broke in Bannington testily.

“It is a big question—I can not answer it offhand,” said Ivan. He stood for a moment, thinking deeply. Then, like one in a dream, he slowly turned and walked from the room.

“A strange man,” commented Emil.

“I believe he is honest.”

"Yes, even is he as strange as that."

"But he lives too much in the clouds."

"For a priest was he intended," said Emil. "He would be the kind of priest that had so much religion to attend to that he could scarcely time to learn his own theology find. Some such there are even yet. Do you realize that Ivan still believes that if a majority of people could be convinced that a thing was right, they would themselves make it so? He like a little child is. I have, myself, seen him pray."

Bannington looked at the calm, gentle face of his visitor critically. "Have you no religion of your own?" he asked.

"What, me?" exclaimed Emil. "How could that be? I have passed through philosophy to science. Religion comes first. Religion is of fear and ignorance. At first all was religion: thunder was the voice of an angry god, good crops were the gifts of a pleased god; everything was of mystery and by offering up sacrifices the gods could be appeased and wheedled. Now, when a ship goes on a rock, only the women pray. A call for help is shot out into the air, other ships receive it, turn about on the trackless ocean with as much certainty as a blind man goes from his bedroom to his breakfast table, and soon they come to the ship on the rocks. There is no more mystery, therefore there can be no more religion."

The old man was shocked, not so much at Emil's words as at his calmness, his sincerity. "Don't you even believe in God?" he asked.

"I believe in nothing which can not be demonstrated,

if not as a fact, then as a theory. The existence of God, I do not deny. I can no more prove that He does not exist than that He does; therefore, I live in the world I can see and feel, and if also He is here, He must admit that my attitude is of more reverence than is the attitude of most Christians."

"Reverence?" exclaimed Bannington indignantly, as he thought of Dick having been exposed to such views for a year. "You are blasphemous. If a man did not have the ten commandments to live by, he would be the vilest savage!"

Emil smiled. "The ten were condensed to two, you remember," he said, "and one of these is impossible. No man can love God."

Richard Bannington forgot his swollen foot and sat erect. "How dare you say such things? Think of all the charity, think of all the churches, think of all the——"

"When a few individuals the wealth which should belong to the entire society grab, it is but natural that they are impelled part of the society's duties to perform—although most of the big gifts are either made as an advertisement, or else the conscience a little to soothe. But how is it possible to love what one never has seen or felt or heard. You are superstitious and afraid to speak the truth; but you do not love Him, yourself. No, but you don't. You do not your great grandfather love, nor the best man on this earth, if you have not come into touch with him. Listen: always with love there is an eager yearning to serve, not as a duty, mind you; but a great, strong passion to pour

out the best that is in you. Ah ha, that is too plain to be missed ; your face shows that it hit even you."

"But there are men who feel this deep yearning to serve God."

Emil shook his head. "No," he said slowly, "the man who best serves God—if there is God—is the man who forgets Him entirely in serving his fellow-man. Many try to flatter God by speaking well of Him, by looking solemn when He is mentioned, by expressing their approval of the way He does things—think of that, a human bug commending Omnipotence! That is why I say I am more reverent than most of the Christians. If God is, then is He too vast for my comprehension, He is infinite, almighty. If He is cruel and revengeful, and vain—as theology teaches—then He will torment me through eternity because I am honest ; but if He is infinitely just—and this is my idea for God—then what have I to fear?

"It is impossible to compare my idea for God with anything else ; but to show to you exactly that which I am striving to convey, listen. Suppose that I had the wisdom to understand the speech of an ant. I build a grand house and disturb the dwelling places of many ants. They resent it, they call me bitter names, they curse me. Now then, would I roast them on a slow fire? Why vicious man has a society which would prevent it, even though the roasting could but a few minutes last. Now, remember that I am a human, and vain and cruel, yet I should sympathize with the ants and, if it were possible, prepare for them a new village. You say you reverence God, and yet you teach that if

we don't do this or that foolishness, His infinite wisdom, justice, and love will punish us throughout eternity. Bah, my God is divine, yours is nothing but a giant who has never been civilized."

Bannington was really astonished that a bolt of lightning did not strike Emil dead at his feet. He had received very rigid religious instruction at his mother's knee, and during all his busy life this instruction had clung to him. As his intellect had matured, his religion had remained the same primitive belief which had found lodgment in his unseasoned child's mind. He seldom talked of religion, he seldom went to church, he gave his gifts and felt that he was on good terms with his Creator; but to be brought face to face with himself, his queer, creaky creed, and the bland agnosticism of his visitor, was much like a sleep-walker awaking to find himself in the midst of a cold, rushing stream.

"We do not find God because we do not do the work He has left us to do," faltered Bannington, striving to force his memory to give up certain forms which had long lain idle.

"Bah," scoffed Emil. "How could a finite being do the work of an infinite being? It always makes me laugh to hear one of you reverent ones apologize for God."

"Apologize for Him?"

"Sure. You say He is a personal being who controls every earthly action—I mean the ones of you who even pretend to be logical—and then when some terrible calamity occurs which, if done deliberately would be of a vast cruelty, you fold your hands and say that

the locality was for its sin punished. A little child dies, you say God took him because He loved him. A drunkard breaks his neck, you say he aroused the wrath of God and was stricken. You give God credit for all the movements of nature, and then explain their purpose so that He will still appear respectable to be. You examine only your own narrow hearts, and find your own souls sitting there in the gloom and you rush out and say you have found God."

"I don't see how you can look on the works of nature, the stars, the mountains, the wonderful variety of creation, and doubt the existence of God," said the old man in a low, reverent tone. He felt inadequate to the occasion and the situation accused him and filled him with humility.

"Now, I will tell you how I plan my life," said Emil. "I do not seek to find God Himself, because no good would it do me. I only seek to find the great laws of the universe. These laws are just: neither kind nor cruel, neither resentful nor forgiving, just just. Justice is godlike, I bow before it. I have in my body sensations. All knowledge whatsoever comes to me through sensations. I am of material made, therefore all things must come to me in the form of material—everything, everything, I say, even my emotions. Certain of my sensations seem to initiate in my own body. I call them appetites, desires. If God wished to talk to me, He would talk through them. Yes, that would be logical, just.

"Also I have observation and memory—faculties and functions of my material brain—and I observe that

certain sensations are pleasant and certain others painful. If God were a personal being who had revealed himself orally, pain would be a curse; but to me pain is the great teacher; pain is ever watchful, pain is just. I observe that some acts yield pleasant sensations, but the reaction is painful. I consider this, I store it away, I call it experience, it becomes my monitor. When I heed my monitor, I am healthy, I am content, I am happy. Otherwise, not. Now, the highest development in man is the social instinct, the social experience, the social conscience. No man can himself safeguard, but all men working in unison could remove sickness, and poverty, and pain. All the books of all the religions have I read, they are confusion. Nature is the same always. Her I listen to and she deceives me not. If God is, nature is His revelation."

"I can see your position," said Bannington, "and it is not so irreverent as it seemed at first, but your very arguments prove the existence of God."

"Not so. It merely proves that if there be a God, He is infinite and just; caring nothing whatever for any individual at all. The innocent child is permitted to starve to death, or to be ground up in the mills and factories, and God does not a hand to save him reach. It is merely written down on the social experience that if man wishes his species to continue, he must coöperate, he must learn to protect his own young through social supervision. God has merely tossed out a world and said, 'Fight for it;' and we have fought for it; fought with the prehistoric monsters, with the tiny germs, and with one another. We have loved the fight,

but we have not loved the God who tossed us the world to fight over. Some day, when we have conquered ourselves, even as we have already conquered distance, time and the secrets of production, we shall begin to look up; and if there is a God, we shall find Him through loving our fellow-man; but now we must continue to fight, and one thing at a time is plenty. Matter changes its form, but it is not destructible. Life changes its form, but neither is it destructible. If life continues the same individual life through its changes, then some day I, my very self, may say I have found God. Until then I shall remain as I am, growing like a tree."

Twilight had begun to fling her long shadows across the landscape, and the restful peace of a weary day stole in with its soothing silence. The two men sat thinking, and their thoughts reached far and wide in many directions. They did not hear the door open and Ivan enter.

Ivan walked up to the old man and, without reference to any foregoing subject, said with sad firmness: "I can not approve."

"You can't approve of what?" demanded Bannington, who was undecided as to whether Ivan objected to the outcome of his theological discussion with Emil or if he objected to all religious discussions from principle.

"I can not approve of your nephew's going into your plant," answered Ivan earnestly. "We are all subject to our environment and he is still unformed. He would be shaken by his new duties, he would soon get into

your way of thinking, he would find himself in the midst of problems demanding instant attention, and he would lose his high ideals, his purpose, his real life-work. I can not approve."

"You don't have to approve," rejoined Bannington, glad to find himself on solid rock again. "I'll take all the responsibilities. I only wanted to give you an opportunity to display your brand of judgment. I don't think much of it. It is impractical."

"No," murmured Emil, "it is of experience. Socialists have been taken into the cabinets of Europe. They soon began to think like ministers. We want all socialists to think like working-men."

"When did you work last?" flashed Richard Bannington, turning upon him.

Emil chuckled. "This is the way that personal controversies always start. They amount to nothing, except to pass the time away. Science deals with generalizations, unscience confines itself to freaks, the hero, the genius, the honest lawyer, the scrupulous captain of industry." He closed his eyes, drew a deep breath, and when he resumed there was a vibrant undertone in his voice which entirely removed its usual academic impersonality. "Twelve years ago I stoked a tramp steamer for ten months against my will and without receiving pay. You say such a thing would be impossible. To me it happened and still in my nostrils are the sickening smells, and still do I gag at the rotten food I swallowed. Since then with my hands I have not worked. Now, when I work, it is with the head. My memory is good; I can do many things; but all I work

for is a modest living. No man shall ever again make of my labor much profit. I am on a strike."

"Well, hanged if I wouldn't like to know what the tests for insanity are, nowadays," cried Bannington. "You two loaf from one year's end to another, and yet you devote yourselves to bewailing the hardships of the laboring man. I wish I had the power to put you at hard labor for the rest of your days. I would—but remember, that as long as you are Dick's guests, you are perfectly welcome at Bannington Park, and what I say is said freely and impartially, and just the same as if we had happened to meet at a way station."

"That is all right," said Emil, smiling. "You have been a good host. I have felt at liberty to say all I had to say. Now it is time to wash for dinner, so I'll say *au revoir* for a few moments."

Ivan followed his friend from the room and Bannington sat gazing after them. He shook his head while several conflicting expressions flitted across his grim old face. "I wonder what would have happened to me if I had fallen in with that pair when I was Dick's age, having plenty of money and nothing to do. I don't want to be unjust to the boy, he's only a boy. I wonder if he has any religion. Hardly know whether I have any myself, now. This has been a stimulating afternoon, and my fool foot is lots better. To think of a man being on a strike all by himself." He broke into a chuckle. "I'll be sorry to lose that German."

The old man dropped into a silent reverie, drumming noiselessly on the arm of his chair with long, energetic fingers. "Ivan was right," he said after a space,

striking the arm with his fist. "It will change his way of thinking. He will get into the habit of thinking like me, if he gets in the habit of working with me. If I can just land him in the harness, he'll be so blamed busy that he won't have time to bother with theories; and he won't have much sympathy with labor unions after he's had a fight or two with them. If he does, he's not of the stuff I take him for.

"I feel a blamed sight better. I think I'll go out to dinner myself to-night. I'm going to set 'em all three to talking religion. I'd like to hear the count's views. I'll bet he's got a religion like a snake!"

He rose, and after taking a few painful steps, he used a straight-backed chair for a cane, and returned to the desk near which his easy chair was standing. He struck the bell angrily, waited a second and struck it repeatedly. In a moment the butler entered with a perturbed expression on his wooden face.

"Why don't you pay closer attention?" demanded Bannington. "Hand me my cane—now give me your shoulder—steady, stupid, steady."

With much grumbling and much fuss, the head of the house of Bannington walked gingerly out to dinner, hoping to study his nephew's face during a religious discussion. The butler hoped they would escape a collision with the furniture.

CHAPTER XIV

UNCLE RICHARD COLLIDES

DINNER was a disappointment to Richard Bannington: Dick did not appear, the count refused to be drawn into a religious discussion, Emil refused to be insulted, and Ivan flinched from an unkind remark without striking back. This was really the hardest blow. The old man prided himself on his spirit of fair play; he made it a rule not to take advantage of his position, and to have one of his guests meekly pocket an affront was to put him into a situation from which there was no honorable retreat, and he had left his guests over their coffee and cigars and had come into the library in a highly irritated condition.

He had his chair drawn close to the fireplace and sat down with a discontented groan. "I wish it was cool enough to have a fire," he grumbled. "A human being is as uncertain as Sunday-school-picnic weather. Oh, wrath, I wish this foot would get well!"

He looked at the head-lines on the front pages of three evening papers, rumbled them up, and cast them to the floor like a spoiled child. "They're all alike," he muttered; "always the same proportion of scandal, accidents and crimes. I'd just as soon read a paper ten years old as one ten minutes old. Good land, to think that I once subscribed to a clipping bureau to

find out what the newspapers said about me! I must have been demented. I would not give two cents—”

He was interrupted by the butler who entered to report that the two keepers had brought in a woman whom they had caught trespassing on his grounds. He considered the matter a moment. He had felt perfectly justified in building the high board fence. When the first two keepers had made clear the impossibility of their thoroughly patrolling so large an area, he had added two others so that there could be night and day shifts, and had given them rigid instructions to bring the first trespasser directly to himself. But now that he was called on to assume the rôle of a feudal overlord, it took on an unexpected and bizarre appearance, and he was impelled to bid them send the woman on her way.

If he had not been in a bad temper, he would undoubtedly have done so, but as it was, he hardened his face and said shortly: “Bring her in.”

With his well foot he kicked his chair around until it was facing the door and his face wore its most forbidding expression when the two guards entered, holding by the arms Miss Burton who struggled indignantly but futilely.

She looked Bannington fiercely in the eyes. “Of all the outrageous acts which you have done in a miserably misspent lifetime, this is the worst. It does not seem possible that in any civilized land at this period of the world’s history—”

“Never mind the world’s history,” interrupted the old man dryly. Her appearance stimulated and soothed

him. The situation promised to be exactly the safety-valve which he needed. "Tell me what is the matter as briefly and as calmly as possible. My doctor has ordered quiet and I insist on having it."

"I merely stepped into your grounds for a moment, and these ignorant foreigners pounced on me and—"

"What did you step into my grounds for?"

"Don't think for one moment that I would set foot on your grounds for my own pleasure," returned Miss Burton, holding her head high and shaking it vigorously. "I was in search of a young girl, a wayward, headstrong creature who is under my supervision and who makes my life a burden by her—"

"Well, that is no reason why you should come and make my life a burden," interjected Bannington, who felt that the board-fence investment was beginning to pay dividends. Long training had given him the power to enjoy things thoroughly without altering the misanthropic expression of his face. "From which direction did you come?"

"I came from the eastern side of—"

"Well, Great Scott, how did you climb that fence?" interrupted Bannington.

"You are positively insulting! Do you think that I should ever attempt to climb a fence fifteen feet high, to say nothing—"

"It is not fifteen, it is only ten. What do you suppose it was put up for, anyway?"

"I refuse to suppose anything about either your fence or any other of your barbarous actions. I have told you that I merely stepped on to your premises in

order to seek a young girl. I had no idea that in my own dear America, the land of the free, I should find armed guards patrolling a division fence which in itself is an eyesore to the culture and refinement of the twentieth century. I mentioned the freedom of this country, but of course it means freedom to do right and not—”

“I have heard about freedom before, and you need not feel called on to deliver a lecture,” interrupted Bannington. “You don’t suppose that I put up that fence and hired these guards to trap a governess, do you? For the last ten days there hasn’t a soul come near me without trying to add to my education. I know all I want to know—my opinions suit me exactly; and, as far as freedom goes, my land is my own, and if I want to build a fifty-foot wall around it and put a roof over it and sow it with bear-traps, I am going to do it in spite of all the woman-suffragists and the socialists, and the rest of the cranks put together. Furthermore, you are guilty of trespass, and I intend to make an example—”

“If you do not permit me to leave at once, I shall write up this outrage in every newspaper in the country. I shall have all the ministers preach against it, I shall have it told in clubs and hotels until you—”

“Good work,” commended Bannington. “Go ahead, and if your pin-money runs out before you finish, just send in your bills to my advertising department. What is your name?”

“I refuse to tell you,” answered Miss Burton, for the first time giving evidence of faltering confidence.

"All right. You can tell the justice of the peace if you prefer. But you will have to tell some one, so you might just as well tell me now and have it over with."

Miss Burton's fingers worked convulsively, and the motions they made suggested scratching, her expression was composed of indignation and defiance, but as the old man's cold gray eyes kept steadily on hers, from beneath his heavy brows, a look of nervous dread came to Miss Burton's face. She felt, as a material substance, the power of his will bending hers, and she would have chosen torture rather than to appear at a disadvantage before a Bannington. Yet she could feel the little lines about her eyes weakening and knew that the sooner she surrendered, the more graceful her submission would be. "Do you mean that you would be vulgar enough to force a lady to divulge her name?" she demanded scornfully.

"I don't know the meaning of divulge," returned Bannington with wicked gravity, "but I'm vulgar enough to do anything in order to gain a point."

"Well, then," said Miss Burton, and she really appeared to be granting an impertinent request rather than yielding to force, "it is utterly reprehensible for you to insist, but as long as you are so ill-mannered as to do so, my name is Miss Burton."

"Miss Burton!" exclaimed Bannington, raising himself on the arms of his chair, and then sinking back as from a shock. "Well, I don't blame Dick a bit. He don't have to marry you! I mean, madam"—as he noted the expression of her face—"that I am sorry that

I have inconvenienced you. You see, I am a very ill man, a little delirious. I—”

“That will do!” cried Miss Burton. “You have deliberately insulted me, and it is useless to attempt to pass it off. This is not the end of it, I can assure you. I shall tell my cousin of this—you may be sure of that. And furthermore—”

Richard was really sorry that he had been so careless as to offend unintentionally, and he stopped her with upraised hand and said in his most pacific voice: “My dear Miss Burton, this is all a mistake, and I am sorry. I did not intend to capture you, believe me, and I shall discharge those stupid keepers, as soon as I am through with them. The fact is that, uh—that there have been many attempts lately to steal—to steal my nephew’s bulldog, and this fence was one of *his* whims. But I am convinced that you would never think of stealing a bulldog, and I shall give orders that in the future you are given the entire freedom of my grounds.”

“Oh, no,” answered Miss Burton, giving her head a patrician toss, “you may wish to drop it, but I assure you—”

“Now don’t bother to thank me,” interjected Bannington. “It was all a mistake in the first place. You may walk on my grounds as much as you please, you may knock boards off the fence; or better still, I’ll have gates cut through. No, hang it, I’ll have the fence pulled down. Now, Higgins, conduct Miss Burton to the door. Or perhaps you had better see her home. It is quite dark. Madam, I wish you good evening.”

Miss Burton cast a scornful glance at Richard Bannington, a disdainful one at the humble Higgins, a resentful, but still a partially triumphant one at the two guards who were still standing awkwardly at the door, and with very erect carriage she followed Higgins to the front door where she curtly refused his further services.

Bannington wiped his brow. "Good heavens," he muttered. "I saw that woman at Burton's a month or so ago, but I thought her the housekeeper. Well, Dick has won this deal, all right."

He suddenly remembered the guards who were beginning to fidget. "Don't bring any one else to me," he said decisively. "Did you find that stone building I told you of?"

The guards nodded and Bannington continued, "If you catch any one else, shut them up in that, and in the morning take them over to Squire Newton's—the stableman will tell you where it is—and I'll telephone him what I want done with them. That's all."

When the old man was left alone again he kicked his chair around until it faced the fireplace, and, as was his custom, proceeded to talk to himself in a gruff undertone. "I shall never read another novel," was his first utterance. "I suppose it must be twenty years now since Thompson told me I ought to read novels to take my mind off business and give me a chance to rest. I must have read a thousand of the fool things—this is the last time that Thompson doctors me! The very moment any opposition is put between two people of the opposite sex, in a novel, they immediately fall in

love and get married—if they have to go up in a balloon to do it. Suppose Dick had fallen in love with Miss Burton!”

Bannington paused and began to grin. At first the grin was hesitating and diffident, but as he thought back over the interview, muscle after muscle in his grim face relaxed, and when he finally began to chuckle, the similarity between his own and his nephew's face was very marked indeed. “The girl has her father's grit all right, but she's too overbearing, too overbearing. I don't see where she ever got such an air. Higgins, Higgins!”

The butler entered promptly, but Bannington was now under the sway of a new desire, and he said petulantly: “Higgins, I don't see why you can never be where I want you. I have had to call you a dozen times every time I have wanted you to-day, and that fool doctor says I must have quiet. Help me into my office. It is time already for my private secretary to be here. The minute I get a little out of repair, everybody in the world keeps me waiting; but I'm getting better, at that. Now be careful, be careful.”

When they reached the office, Bannington sank into his chair with a throaty sigh, and said: “The very minute Lorrimer arrives, send him in—do you hear?”

The butler withdrew and the old man stretched his arms and reclined more heavily in his easy chair. The lids drooped over his eyes and his face relaxed. He was alone now, there was no need for pretense of any kind, and as his mind wandered where it would, a smile, tinged with sadness and longing, but still a smile,

took all the grimness out of his face and made it one that baby hands would have loved to pat. Some day, these cold "business faces" of ours will be as obsolete as the steel armor of our ancestors; some day, giving will be considered more manly than grabbing, but in the meantime, let us fight as best we may until the fight be done.

CHAPTER XV.

LORRAIN SCATTERS TACKS

LORRAIN was moody that evening and his patience refused to stand the strain when Emil and Ivan took opposing sides on the question whether the legal execution of rebels by tyrants or the illegal execution of tyrants by rebels, had done the more to advance the cause of freedom. As they warmed to their work and the history of the human race was being sifted in search of facts to support one side or the other, Lorrain pushed back his chair impatiently and strolled aimlessly into the library just as Bannington and Higgins turned into the hallway which led to the office.

He walked over to the window and stood looking out with his hands thrust into his pockets and his brows drawn together. In his trips to New York, Lorrain had not visited the socialists. Instead he had hunted up some influential acquaintances whom he had met abroad, and they had procured him the privileges of several clubs. Lorrain proved himself an exception to the typical foreigner of title by cultivating the society of men instead of women; and it must be confessed that he had the faculty of making men like him without appearing to put forth any efforts in that direction.

His friends invariably introduced him as Count Lorrain; he invariably protested that he had given up his title and preferred to dispense entirely with its use. His protests were made with frank sincerity.

He spent his money freely but wisely, was able to discuss any subject, and had plenty of European gossip to offer in exchange for the home product. But his supply of money had been very limited and already he was in debt to several of his new friends. The amounts were small and for that very reason he wanted to be in a position to pay on the faintest hint. He had expected no difficulty in securing an ample loan from Dick, but that individual seemed to have pressing affairs of his own and Lorrain was vexed at the awkwardness of his situation.

He heard a slight noise at the library door, and turning saw a young man with a cornet case in his hand. The two eyed each other critically without speaking. There was a marked resemblance between them, although the new-comer was younger and smooth-shaven. His face denoted evident displeasure at the meeting, while Lorrain's face indicated a certain low satisfaction.

"I thought that you had moved to New York," said the man with the cornet case, who was Edward Lorrimer, Richard Bannington's private secretary.

"I returned this afternoon," replied Lorrain. "You do not seem rejoiced to see your brother after our long separation."

"I never wanted to see you again," said Lorrimer bitterly. "When I found that you had come to this

country, I at first thought it was to make restitution; but after noting your actions, I find that you are still the same."

"Still the same—still in need of money," admitted Lorrain without embarrassment. "You appear to be prosperous—may I look to you for a little temporary relief?"

"Now, see here, Claude," said Lorrimer soberly, "I am not at all wealthy. I have worked hard and I have paid back the money which you got through forgery, but I—"

Lorrain raised his hand. "I perfectly comprehend," he said. "It is not necessary to parade the family skeleton—for it is a family skeleton, you know. I prefer not to refer to the past at all; the present is unpleasant enough as it is. I am seriously in debt and young Bannington claims that he can not relieve my embarrassment."

"Gambling?" asked Lorrimer.

"Yes—the American form—margins. I found it necessary in order to stand in with a certain influential clique."

"How much?" asked Lorrimer shortly.

Lorrain slowly took a cigarette from his case, as he estimated the amount which his brother should have accumulated during his residence in the country where fortunes were often made in a week. There was a keenness to his brother's face, a composed confidence which resembled the expressions of the successful business men he had met.

"Nearly ten thousand dollars, all told," he ventured.

"It is out of the question," said Lorrimer decisively. "I am not rich."

"I see you as a guest in this house," argued Lorrain. "I am sure you are not a friend of Dick's. Why should a poor man come to see the head of the Bannington Steel Plant?"

"I am in his employ," said Lorrimer.

"What! A common workman?"

"No, his private secretary," answered Lorrimer, a slight smile curving his lips.

"That is better," admitted Lorrain complacently. "I could not bear to think of a Lorrain descending to common labor. Does not your position pay well?"

"The salary is fair, but it is chiefly valuable as a stepping-stone. I have studied the business closely, have been of service to the firm, and as soon as I can buy a little more stock, I am to be made a director."

"This proves you to be in the confidence of the management. There is surely some way in which you can help me." Lorrain's tone was ingratiating.

"I know of none, and I must leave you now. Mr. Bannington is waiting for me and he insists on punctuality," replied Lorrimer coldly.

"Oh, he can wait a few minutes. I am in really a desperate fix, and you will have to assist me."

"Have to?" questioned Lorrimer, his eyes narrowing a little.

"Yes, have to," answered Lorrain, lowering his voice and speaking slowly. "You must not forget that you took the blame on your own shoulders and that it rests

there yet. Would the old man desire a director who had confessed to forgery in France?"

It was an old, old situation, trite in fiction, hackneyed on the stage, and yet, in spite of its having hung over him for years, it suddenly took living shape before Lorrimer's eyes. For a moment his mouth weakened, and then it once more hardened into its habitual calm determination, typical of the modern man of business.

"You were the favorite," he stated in matter-of-fact tones. "I took the blame to temper the blow as much as possible to our father. I think that Mr. Bannington would believe me and understand. As neither of our parents is now living, there is no longer any inducement for me to retain my false position and if you make any disclosures, you alone would be the loser. You would lose even the false title you wear."

Lorrain appeared perfectly at ease. "It is not a question of choice with me," he said. "If I don't get the money, I go under anyway. It is entirely up to you."

"I can not wait longer," said Lorrimer. "Here is my address; you may call and see me any evening."

"Don't forget that I must have part of the money by day after to-morrow," said Lorrain as his brother started to leave the room. Lorrimer made no sign, and after following him to the door, Lorrain turned and walked back to the window. "I still have a leverage on him," he muttered, "and if he does not give in gracefully, I shall squeeze."

Again he turned from the window, and again he

found himself face to face with his brother. For the first time he noted the cornet case. "Since when did you become a musician?" he asked.

Lorrimer glanced down at the case, but paid no attention to the question. "I would help you if I could," he said, "but I can not. I am willing to give you enough to leave the country, but as for advancing ten thousand dollars—it is out of the question."

The cornet case had given Lorrain an idea. He felt sure that no musical instrument was inside, but that the case was used to carry important papers without attracting attention. "I do not want to cause you trouble," he said candidly, "but I must have money. I have overheard the old man talking to Dick, and I know there is some kind of a big deal on. Give me a straight, inside tip, and I'll find some way to turn it into money."

Lorrimer clenched his hand fiercely. "You may as well drop that," he said sternly. "I took blame for your forgery, but while this has ruined my reputation in France, it has not ruined my sense of honor. I shall never reveal a single secret."

"It would be much the easiest way," said Lorrain with irritating composure. "I don't want to be forced to resort to extreme measures, but you can help me if you will—and I intend that you shall."

"You may do whatever you please," answered Lorrimer firmly. "I wash my hands of you."

He left the room abruptly and Lorrain seated himself at the center-table. For a while he sat with a thoughtful frown on his brow, and then with a pleased

smile he sprang to his feet and crossing the hall, he left the house by the side door. Soon after this a low whistle floated out from a clump of bushes in which rested a bench.

CHAPTER XVI

DICK STEERS : CUPID PICKS THE PATH

IT had been a busy day for Dick and Mulligan. He had come out from New York on the train that reached Minster at seven o'clock, and had hastened to the oak-tree post-office at the far end of the park before entering the house. He found two little missives for each day that he had been away and as he was careful to read them in exactly the order in which they were sent, and was quick to note their progressive fervor, a strange buoyancy filled his bosom as though his soul were dancing for joy. Well, probably it was.

Their affair had progressed amazingly, although kept strictly within the boy and girl limits which they had originally set; and the one time that he had kissed her, she had refused to be mollified until he had produced a half-dozen standard child-stories to prove that this was an incident, strictly consistent with the game they were playing. Even then she had refused to permit a repetition, in spite of his convincing arguments that this bit of realism was positively necessary to give class to their purely histrionic production.

She had proved to be a rather exacting young lady, refusing to step foot on the Bannington grounds, even though the tangled seclusion was greatly preferable to the possible publicity of the country road where

he had met her while riding Roland. Furthermore, she would not speak to him during the day, but insisted on using the oak tree and written communications. And this was carrying things to extremes because she had caused a small pavilion to be erected in the corner of the Burton grounds so close to the oak tree that she could write her missives in the pavilion and mail them without leaving it. Dick was getting his first personal experience of feminine unreason.

This pavilion had been erected to mislead the young lady's aunt, who was inclined toward catechizing and who demanded ample reasons for any change of routine. A book and a note-book seemed ample excuse for a maiden seeking the privacy of a pavilion, and Bayard, the collie, lent dignity and safety to the situation. Not that lying on a rug and waiting for something to happen was a career which Bayard would have selected had his choice been a free one. Humans are a straining trial to an intelligent and discriminating dog.

Strange as it may seem to those who have not observed closely, or who have forgotten, Dick and the girl scarcely touched on family affairs. While together, they had even forgotten that they had any. Of course it is undeniable that scientific mating, which would take into account inherited tendencies, would greatly improve the human, as it has already many of the brute species, but, unfortunately, most marriages are arranged by impulsive young things who forget that there are more than two members of the human race, and what is even more disastrous, entirely over-

look the possibility of the membership ever being increased.

After Dick had read, re-read, and read over the notes, he scribbled a hasty answer which pleaded eloquently for a prompt interview, and then he hastened in to breakfast. As soon as this was finished, he and Mulligan hurried back to the oak tree. It was still early and no answer was waiting. This so wrought on Dick's nerves that he tore through the underbrush, filling Mulligan with expectancy and causing the keepers endless annoyance. When at last they caught up with Dick, he made it perfectly clear that there was an incompatibility between himself and them which no amount of attention could bridge, and after they had acted on Dick's suggestion and had gone to guard the part of the park closest to the Staunton place, Dick returned to the woodsy post-office with the disappointed Mulligan, and was elated to find an answer waiting him.

He had not gone to the trouble of erecting a pavilion on his side of the fence. A tree with a leaning trunk, a small grassy bank, and a tangle of larch and wild grapevine furnished all the comforts and seclusion which he demanded; and until it was time for him to attend the luncheon with the labor leaders and the labor stragglers, a constant succession of notes passed in and out of the hollow oak. Occasionally a strong brown hand met a slender one, but the owner of the slender hand resisted pressure, even though she did not entirely flee its temptation, and when Dick was at last forced to tear himself away, she still refused

to grant him an interview at the exact spot where they had first met.

Dick was obsessed with this romantic fancy and he was a little exasperated as he ran along the path, ten minutes too late to receive his guests. His last note had been a trifle peremptory, and much of the discussion which took place at the luncheon escaped him because his mind kept wondering what effect this last note would have on its recipient. Even during his interview with his uncle, the note and its possible result insisted on claiming as much of his attention as possible.

As soon as he left his uncle, he straightway forgot him, and with the skeptical, but still hopeful Mulligan at his side, sped back to the hollow oak. He found a note inside. The note had neither beginning nor ending. It merely stated: "I shall accede to your wish."

He read it through many times: it seemed cold, it seemed to hold a veiled menace, and again he considered the contents of his own note. He had merely pointed out that inasmuch as he was leaving home for good, he felt that he had the right to insist on a matter which, while trivial in itself, would mean so much to him during all the rest of his life.

Perhaps he had been presuming, perhaps even overbearing; and he longed for an opportunity to perfect the arrangements, or even free her from her promise if it was as distasteful to her as the tone of her note implied, but she was not in the pavilion, and after waiting until it began to grow dark, he regretfully left his post and hurried to the bench upon which they had

sat on that wonderful "first day" which seemed so long ago.

He threw himself heavily on the bench, thrust his hands into his pockets, dropped his head forward, and began to think. He thought deeply, he thought rapidly, but it must be confessed that the proletariat was as far from his thoughts as was the pterodactyl or the saber-toothed tiger. Mulligan drew nigh and rested a heavy chin on his knee, the while his soft brown eyes sent forth waves of sympathy; but Mulligan might as well have been the bench on which his master sat.

After a few moments spent in waiting the strain became unbearable, and Dick sprang to his feet and hurried cautiously along the path in the direction from which the girl had originally come, the dejected Mulligan following doggedly, very doggedly, after. When they reached the point where the path branched into three, Dick stepped into a dense shadow and again waited. Mulligan threw himself on the grass with a guttural sigh. His master was not aware that an opportunity for dinner had been missed; Mulligan was.

Again the moments spent in inaction tore at his nerves, and soon Dick was walking swiftly, but cautiously, down the path which led toward the Burton place. The moon had risen and threw shadows which played strange tricks with his eyes. He was wearing his rough tweed suit and puttees, and as he stole along with every sense alert, an odd undercurrent of pleasure flowed through his anxiety. He was so much

alive that the body of him rejoiced in spite of his mental state.

After exploring each of the paths, returning to the bench, and still failing in his quest, a wave of suspicion swept over him. She had fooled him, she had never intended to come, she had merely played with him. Hot anger took possession of him and he started toward the house, but with every step the reaction grew apace, and finally, his faith returning stronger than ever, he paused and was on the point of turning around when he heard an indistinct noise, some distance ahead and a little to the left.

He stooped and seizing Mulligan by the neck, he whispered hoarsely: "Don't you dare to make a sound."

Giving the dog a threatening toss, which effectually impressed him with the seriousness of the case, Dick crept cautiously forward. They were close to a small but massive stone building in which had been formerly kept a grizzly bear which a misguided friend of his uncle's had sent him when the bear was a roly-poly cub. As the bear was approaching maturity, Dick's faculty for original research resulted in the escape of the bear, and when he was finally recaptured it was considered to the best interest of all concerned that he take up his future residence in the Bronx Zoo. The openings in the den through which the cub had passage to a small steel-barred yard, had been bricked so that the mushrooms which at one time Dick thought he would enjoy cultivating might have suitable darkness; and it was the creaking of the rusty hinges on the door to

this stone building which had attracted Dick's attention.

He stole cautiously forward and from a dense shadow he saw one of the keepers locking the ponderous lock, while the other keeper stood near. This aroused Dick's curiosity, but the next moment an emotion was aroused which hardened all his muscles and made him take an involuntary step forward. He distinctly heard the voice of the girl, the one girl, coming from the inside of the den, and pleading for freedom.

For one brief moment an angry shout rose to Dick's lips, and then he became strangely cool, unnaturally deliberate. The shout did not escape his lips. He seemed to be sitting comfortably in a large office while plan after plan presented itself, argued its cause, was refused, and passed on to give place to the next plan. He must free the girl without disclosing her identity. In order to do this, he must not appear in the case himself until after she had plenty of time to reach her own home. The keepers were Austrians of large size and obstinate tempers: these interesting facts he had learned from Ivan on his return, and he rightly suspected that his abuse of the day keepers had been communicated to those who had the night shift and was not very likely to increase his popularity with them.

It required some time for all the prompt plans to pass a given point; and in the meantime the keepers had separated and gone in opposite directions. He could not quite decide on future strategy, but there was

no question as to the next step: he must reassure the girl.

There were no windows in the den. Light had formerly been admitted through horizontal slits, six inches wide, but these also had been bricked up. The moonlight, which was now fairly strong, filtered in through the branches and fell on one of these slits, showing where several of the bricks had fallen out; but even if all of them were removed, the opening in the stone would have been too narrow to permit escape. Dick crept up to the door and gave a low call.

Instantly the noise on the inside—which had been a species of dry sobbing—ceased, and Dick said: "Hush, it is I."

"I hate you," came the prompt reply.

"I don't blame you," responded Dick, after recovering from the shock and hesitating long enough to look at things as they were, "but first you must—"

"Why did you lure me here?" demanded the girl.

"Don't be silly," said Dick indignantly. "I did not lure you here. I do not want you here. I have been hunting all over the park for you. Where on earth have you been?"

"Oh, this is terrible!" came the irrelevant response. "Auntie became suspicious and insisted on entertaining me most of the afternoon and after dinner. I fairly had to steal away for my usual walk, and then I was between two dilemmas—"

"Make it as short as you can," encouraged Dick.

"Well, I couldn't leave Bayard at home or they would know something unusual was about to happen,

and I couldn't bring him with me because one of the keepers or Mulligan—"

"What the deuce did you do?" asked Dick, who thoroughly appreciated the impossible situation.

"I tied him to a fence post in the Staunton pasture," answered the girl.

"He'll gnaw the rope and go home," said Dick pessimistically.

"It was a chain," said the girl, but without enthusiasm. "I think their cow is in the pasture and if it comes near, Bayard will make a fuss. Then the whole neighborhood will be aroused."

"I had better get the dog before I rescue you," said Dick.

"Don't you dare!" cried the girl. "It is perfectly horrid in here. If they find him, they will think he has been stolen—maybe."

"No, they will think that you have been kidnapped," answered Dick, who was still without a plan of his own and therefore refused a ray of hope to penetrate their gloom.

"Why don't you let me out?" asked the girl. Dick was thinking and the question did not seem of sufficient importance to interrupt his train of thought. "Oh, where are you?" cried the girl.

"Not so loud," cautioned Dick sternly, "you are not on a golf links!" A plan had flashed into his head and the clouds had lifted. "I must leave you for a while now and you must remain perfectly quiet. It will be all right if you do just what I say."

"Oh, I shall die, if you leave me alone in here," ob-

jected the girl. "It was doing just what you said that brought me here. I knew all the time it was perfectly silly, but you—"

"The past is beyond our control," suggested Dick sagely. "The only way that I can get you out is to take one of my friends into my confidence and then it will be simple."

"Yes, and then somebody else will know about it," protested the girl.

"Well, if I stay on the outside, and you on the inside until morning, everybody else will know about it, won't they?" demanded Dick, sinking to logic.

"I don't want to be left alone," responded the girl.

"I am going now," said Dick firmly. "It is the only way. I have faith in you. Don't make me lose it."

"I had faith in you, too," began the girl; but he was gone, running toward the house, almost without caution. Mulligan followed close at heel, hoping that he would eventually get a clue to the protracted insanity of his master.

Upon reaching the house, Dick first procured two pieces of light, fine rope, and then stole cautiously up to the cook's bedroom. He knew it was her evening out, but he especially dreaded a meeting with Gladys. He reached the room in safety, found a light burning, selected a dark, one-piece dress, and stole down the stairs and out the side door again.

After hiding the dress, he carefully raised himself on the sill, and peered through a dining-room window. Emil, with upraised finger, was enlarging on the effect of Cæsar's assassination, while Ivan shook his

head in negation. With a sigh of relief, Dick dropped to the ground and gave a low whistle. In response to the signal, Ivan came to the window, and Dick beckoned to him while he kept one finger on his lips. Ivan understood and telling Emil to remember his argument until his return, he hastened to join Dick.

As he came down the steps Dick placed his hand on his shoulder, and said impressively: "Ivan, I have need of you."

CHAPTER XVII

IVAN CRAWLS UNDER THE MACHINE

AGLAD thrill shot through the Russian at the words. He noted Dick's suppressed excitement and his heart was glad. At last the hour had come, at last a great blow was to be struck for the cause, and with his whole heart in it, he gave his hand to his friend in a mighty grip. He asked no questions, the fervor of his grasp indicated that he was content to await developments, and would then do his part, let that part be what it might.

Dick felt this and a new confidence welled up in his breast. He turned toward the spot where he had hidden the dress, and in turning, stumbled against Mulligan, who felt sure that the mysterious disclosure was soon to be made. "First," said Dick, "we must dispose of the dog."

Mulligan could not understand and so he offered no objection when Dick opened the cellar door and unceremoniously thrust him inside, but when the door was closed between himself and his master he could not restrain a whine of protest.

"Silence," whispered Dick. "Go down the stairs and go to sleep. Now, come along, Ivan."

As Ivan caught step with him, after he had picked up the bundle, Dick proceeded to unfold the part which

his ally was to take. "You must be as silent and careful as possible, Ivan," he said. Ivan nodded. "We are to rescue a girl whom my uncle has imprisoned."

It came as a surprise to the Russian. He was aware that American freedom was largely an ideal, but still, he had never heard of a private individual imprisoning girls, except in the slums, and the situation surprised him. "A girl whom your uncle has imprisoned?" he repeated.

"Yes," replied Dick. "It is necessary to rescue her without disclosing her identity, or letting it be known that I took any part in it."

"Certainly," responded Ivan. "Is she a socialist?"

"Not exactly," answered Dick, "but she will be some time."

"Then why did he imprison her?" asked Ivan, who was prepared to sacrifice himself gladly for a political outlaw, but who had a deep-seated aversion to the ordinary criminal.

"Oh, hang it, Ivan, he's a crank, a fanatic. First he's childish and then he's a monstrous old tyrant. He built that heathen fence and hired those pagan guards, and now he has a girl imprisoned, and we're going to rescue her. Now don't talk. I have everything figured out and all you have to do is to assist me. Keep your eyes and ears open for the keepers. I'll do the rest."

Silently as painted warriors, they stole through the park until they reached the little clearing in which stood the bear den. Here Dick paused and pointing toward it he said: "He's got her in there."

Ivan folded his arms, shook his head, and remarked: "I have thought it over. I do not approve of it."

"That's all right," said Dick heartily. "You don't have to. All you have to do is to help."

"Yes," protested Ivan, "but I do not like to help when I can not approve. It seems all wrong, everything. In the first place to build this fence in free America seems wrong, in the second place, to go against your uncle seems wrong, in the third place—"

"Look here, Ivan," said Dick, tapping him on the shoulder with a stiff forefinger, "if I have to stand here and listen while you put a numeral to all the wrongs of the present age, I may as well go back and get Emil. He's quicker at figures than you."

"That is true," admitted Ivan, "but do you not, yourself, wish to be sure that you are right before you—"

"Oh, damn!" ejaculated Dick, too irritated to use care in the selection of his profanity. "This isn't a case like the next revolution—something to be done in the indefinite future. This has to be done now."

"I can not see why he imprisoned her," replied Ivan with anxious sincerity. "She must have done something; because it is not customary to—"

"Customary," moaned Dick. "Customary! Listen, for any sake, listen: I had a date here with a—"

"A date?" asked the puzzled Ivan.

"It's slang, you know," explained Dick. "In Arabia they eat dates, in your beloved country they use them to recall the moments at which czars have been blown up; but here at home, they merely signify an engagement with an attractive young lady."

"You said she was a prisoner."

"Well, Great Scott, didn't you have to excuse yourself from Russia because you were caught trying to deprive Siberia of some favorite guest?"

"That was in a great cause, not merely for a common trespasser."

"Common trespasser! Well, you have the nerve! Wait until you have seen her. Now, then, I have one of the cook's dresses in this bundle, and I want you to put it on and—"

"Put it on?" cried the astonished Ivan. "Why should I put on the dress of a cook?"

"Ivan, confound you!" said Dick, who was nearly at the end of his patience. "I shall be glad to give you all the details your heart can wish, to-morrow, but this is the time for action." He let the dress unfold and held it invitingly toward his ally. "Come, now, get into this and then—"

"I refuse," said Ivan stiffly. "I am willing to do all that a friend should, but I refuse to be made ridiculous for no reason. Why must I look like a female cook?"

"Don't flatter yourself," returned Dick, "you won't look like her. She'd pull the hair off any one who suggested it. But she is the only one of sufficient size whose dress I could get. Now, hop into it."

Ivan took the dress gingerly and looked at it intently while his face wrinkled with conflicting emotions. Presently, as though turning his back on a drowning friend, he handed back the dress, saying sadly: "No, I can not. Never in all my life have I hopped into a dress. Even when I escaped from Russia, I came

dressed as a man. Was it for this I came to America? No, it was for suffering humanity."

"Oh,"—Dick swallowed—"forget suffering humanity. Humanity is so hardened to suffering by this time, that it won't mind keeping it up the little time that this is going to take you. I can't bother with you any longer. You insisted on coming, you were wild for the chance, now if you are going to have cold feet, why go on back, and I'll risk my life alone. After I am—"

"I am willing to risk my life anywhere, any time, if it will help the cause, but why must I look like a cook? My feet are not cold, I am willing, but it seems all foolishness. If you want to practise at making love—"

"Don't go too far with your infernal stupidity!" threatened Dick, and then recalling the nature of the subject before him, resumed frankly: "This is the idea, Ivan. The guards are armed. If they saw two men prowling about they would shoot, but you dress up like a woman, decoy one of them past this old building, I shall hide in the shadow, throw him, tie him up, we'll do the same with the other one, fling them both into the prison, rescue the girl, and there you are. It is strategy." Dick had been illustrating the various steps in pantomime, and he finished with an impressive gesture, but still Ivan was unconvinced.

"I don't like it," he said. "Why do you not make love in the established form of your country?"

"Well, you are the Marathon arguer, all right! There is no established form in this country. We are an original people and we each make love in a different

manner. And besides,"—as an inspiration arrived—"this is a poor girl, and my uncle insists that I marry a rich one."

"Then will I help the poor girl," cried Ivan, a glad light springing into his face, "and my friend, I honor you for making love superior to riches."

"At last," murmured the relieved Dick, thrusting the dress into Ivan's arms. "Now hurry, old sport. No, no, it goes on over your head—good! Now belt it down. Say, you make a regular wood nymph. Now, sneak down this path and lure the guard after you. When he passes this building, I'll throw him and you jump on his head and hold him while I tie him."

"Suppose he chases me the other way?"

"I don't believe you ever helped a man out of Siberia," said the disgusted Dick. "I doubt if you could get a canary bird out of a cage. If he comes from the wrong way, hide until he goes by, then cough and run. Cough like a woman, though."

The dress only reached a little below Ivan's knees, and as he stalked into the woods, striving to maintain as much dignity as possible, Dick was forced to smother a laugh; but the next moment, he remembered the girl and hurried to the stone building where he gave a low call. The answering call was very plaintive, and Dick was thoroughly in earnest once more. "We'll get you out in a few minutes, fairy princess. Is there anything inside you can stand on to look out of that little hole?" he asked cheerily.

"There isn't a single thing," came the reply in accusing tones. "It is the dreariest place in the world. I

have only managed to exist by looking at the ray of moonlight which comes in at that hole. Where am I?"

"Now, don't worry," answered Dick, with the exaggerated confidence with which one soothes a child. "We'll have you out in a jiffy. You are in the bear den." A startled scream came from the inside. "Hush, don't do that. There is no bear there now. I kept a cub when I was a kid. I wish I could see you, princess."

"I wish I could get out of here," was the rather prosaic response.

"Are you sure there is nothing to stand on?"

"Of course I am. Can't you get me out at once?"

"No, we have to hive the two keepers first. What are you sitting on?"

"I'm not sitting at all. There is nothing in here to sit on."

"What! Does my heartless uncle expect his captives to stand up all night in the dark? He's a regular villain! Never mind, it won't be long now. This is lots of fun anyway, don't you think so?"

"No, I don't. I think it's horrid."

"Oh, you'll see the other side after it's all over. This'll be a good yarn to tell the children when you're a gray-haired grandmother, won't it?" chuckled Dick, whose wayward fancy had gone far afield. He waited in vain for an answer, and then said: "Can't you hear what I say?"

"I can hear part of it; but why don't you do something to get me out? I—"

"Hush," cautioned Dick, "some one is coming up

the path. Now keep quiet, and be ready to obey orders."

He dropped behind some bushes which clustered about the corner of the den, and carefully leaned forward until his view commanded the path. The figure which he had seen dimly at some distance, had passed through the open space and was now in the dense shadow. As it drew closer, he saw that it was dressed as a woman, but was walking without caution. As it drew near to the den, Dick sprang out angrily, demanding: "What the deuce did you come back for? I told you—"

Dick paused in astonishment, it was not Ivan, it was Miss Burton. "That will do," she replied with dignity. "You call yourself the Inspector of Grounds but I have—"

"I beg your pardon for being so abrupt," said Dick, "but I never expected to see you here at this time of night. Still my orders are explicit, and you must leave at once or—"

"That will do," repeated Miss Burton sternly. "I do not permit impertinence from a hireling. Your master has given me permission to come here as much as I please."

"He has, huh?" questioned Dick.

"Certainly. If you doubt my word, call your underlings, who took me before him early this very evening. Have you seen the young girl who was walking here with her dog on the occasion when—"

"Yes—that is, no, but I expect to. I mean I hope I shall not, but if I do—"

"It is evident that you are trying to tell an untruth. Something has happened to her and if any of this household are responsible for it, the law in its most retributive form shall be used on them."

"I sympathize with you," said Dick, who wished her at the bottom of the Red Sea, "but I can not help you. You must leave at once, or I shall lock you up in this building. I am sorry, but these are my orders."

Miss Burton stepped back and looked at him. His face was firm in the moonlight, but still it was not a naturally hard face and she concluded to make an appeal. "You have a good face," she said frankly, "and I am sure that some misfortune has forced you to accept such a mean position. I am going to throw myself on your mercy, and if you have any kindly feelings left for your own mother or sister, I am sure that you will not betray my confidence. This young girl is under my care, she is wayward and headstrong, but until lately she has been perfectly docile." The girl inside stamped her foot at the word docile. She did not care for adjectives usually applied to the domestic animals. "But lately, she has been acting strangely, and to-night she went for a walk against my will. Her mother is not living and if her father, who is a stern and exacting man were to—"

"Yes, but perhaps she is home already. Why don't you return and search your own grounds?" asked Dick, who expected Ivan and the keeper at any moment and had no plan for dealing with the new complication.

"I have just come from there. She went up the road, I know that much; but you see if she has come to no

harm, I should hate to expose what may only be a slight indiscretion on her part; while at the same time I am haunted by all these black-hand stories in the newspapers and feel that perhaps I should telegraph her father. You see—”

“That would be utter folly,” said Dick sweepingly. “She is all right, she has probably—”

“You know absolutely nothing about it, and therefore—”

“Yes, I do know something about it,” said Dick sharply. He was becoming desperate and had decided to change his tactics. “She and that shepherd dog did come on these grounds a while ago. I set my bulldog on them and they ran through the hedge on to the Staunton place.”

“You told me your dog would not bite a human being. I prayed for fifteen minutes before I gained the strength to come here in the dark, and it was what you said that finally convinced me that if I did my duty, I should come to no harm. Building that horrible fence has aroused her resentment and I fear that the spirit of mischief or adventure or—”

“The dog wouldn’t attack a human being unless I set him on,” said Dick; but as an expression of relief came into Miss Burton’s face, he hastened to say: “but he was bitten by a shepherd dog a few days ago, and I fear he is going mad.”

For a moment Miss Burton faced him with staring eyes and then she took a step toward him. “Good heavens, there is no knowing what may have happened to that poor child!” she exclaimed. “You must help

me find her. You must save her. It is your fault. You—"

Dick folded his arms and put on an utterly reckless expression. "It is not my fault," he said coldly. "I am under orders. Whatever happens—"

Miss Burton put her hand pleadingly on his arm. "Oh, you can't be so cruel," she said. "Think—"

"Listen!" cried Dick, casting her roughly off and putting his hand to his ear. "One of the keepers just fired. It may have been at the dog. If he should come this way, I can't be bothered with you. It may have been only another trespasser"—he threw in for good measure—"but I think it was the dog. Now a mad dog will not go near water, you know. You run down this path toward the house. There is a fountain in front of the house. Run around the house and out the front gate. Hurry!"

He started with her, gave her a gentle shove after she had fairly entered the path, and as he watched her running nervously in the direction of the house, he gave a long sigh of relief.

Pulling himself together, he returned to the den and called: "Did you hear what we said, fairy princess?"

"Don't call me fairy princess any more," answered a tearful voice. "I feel perfectly hopeless. We can never straighten out this terrible tangle now—and it is all your fault."

"If you think there is any danger of your forgetting that part of it, I shall write it on a leaf of my notebook and throw it in to you," said Dick dryly. "You may imagine that I planned just such an evening as

this; but I assure you that your enjoyment is only a very slight shade less than my own."

"Why don't you get me out?" she asked.

"You have to set up the pins before you can knock them down," answered Dick.

"I don't know what you mean; but I want to get home before word is sent to my father. I know my hair is turning gray."

"Hush," cautioned Dick again. "I think it is all right this time. Now, not a word."

He dropped into the shadow behind the clump of trees, and fastened his gaze upon the path. He saw two figures approaching, one of them wearing a dress, and a few feet in advance of the other but walking very slowly. Just before entering the small glade, they paused in the heavy shadow and seemed to be embracing.

"He must be crazy," muttered Dick.

CHAPTER XVIII

CLASHES AND CRASHES

THE count was not a nice man. He was extremely careless as to methods, and he was so supremely selfish that unpleasant results to others were of no importance. When he wanted his own way, he endeavored to get it and used whatever tools were most available.

When Gladys had answered his signal earlier in the evening, he had kissed her, very daintily; and had instructed her to find out as much as possible of the conversation which was taking place between Mr. Bannington and his private secretary, promising to go deeper into the love motif as soon as she delivered her report. Gladys did not crave such a commission; but she was fascinated by Lorrain's manner—his haughty disdain interspersed with an occasional caress—and even his selfishness seemed the seal of his noble origin.

So she had played the eavesdropper for him (as she had often done in a less degree for her own entertainment), and when she had brought him her report, he had so far condescended as to take a short walk in the park with her. He did not do this as payment for service. Not at all; he never wasted his favors. He did this to prepare for the possibility of needing her services at some future time. He deserved to be a count

even though his line did happen to be the wrong branch of the family.

Gladys had a good head for styles, but a poor one for figures; and her information was almost too abstract to be valuable. She could merely tell him that there was a large government contract for steel to be used on the Panama construction, steel for three new battle-ships, and steel for all the different railroads in the world, she admitted after some questioning that the railroads had been enumerated, but could not recall them. She said that the amount of the Panama contract was to be exactly two million, three hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars. She was sure of the figures because they were the same as those of the telephone number of her best friend in New York. Lorrain had chided her for not being sure of the amount of the battle-ship contracts, or even if they were government contracts; but still he was elated and reciprocated by being unusually affectionate.

Poor Lorrain was artistic and he detested making love to a common creature. Gladys wore on him terribly, and he was trying to induce her to return home; while she was trying to induce him to "speak some more poetry, it went so well with the moonlight."

As they lingered in the shadow, Dick was consumed with a desire to rush forth and wring Ivan's neck, for he still thought that Gladys was his ally, but at last the figure wearing the dress came rapidly toward where he was hiding, while the man followed after. As he passed close to Dick, Dick tackled him savagely. Lorrain uttered a startled imprecation, and Dick rolled off

and dove into the bushes, hoping that he had not been recognized. For the same reason, Lorrain sprang to his feet and ran toward the house.

Dick leaned against a tree. "Lorrain and Gladys, Great Scott!" he exclaimed beneath his breath. "Oh, this is only a dream. Nothing like this could really happen. I suppose my respected uncle and the cook will next appear!"

He walked over to the den, wondering as to the fate of Ivan, and deciding that if he did not appear shortly he would go and get Emil. "But if I leave here and he comes back and is captured with that dress on, he'll commit murder," he said, stopping short and throwing out his arm as though inviting controversy. "But," he added, "if I delay much longer, Miss Burton will reach home and call out the militia."

He composed himself with an effort and approached the den. "Did you hear a scuffle?" he called.

"Yes, I did; and I can't stand this another minute. If you do not get me out at once, I shall go hysterical and scream, or else I shall faint."

"No, no, you mustn't!" cried Dick in alarm. "It would spoil everything. If you are calm enough to make choice between two such perfectly silly performances, I don't see why you can't cut them both out altogether."

"Of course you can't see!" angrily, "you're a man, and a man can never see anything except something to eat or drink. What kind of nerves do you think I have? Here I am, locked up in a bear den, my family searching the neighborhood for me, and I just heard

you fighting with some one. Who was he? Did you injure him?"

"You poor little thing," comforted Dick. "I don't blame you a bit. It was only a fool boy flirting with the maid. No, I did not injure him. Merely frightened him. I never injure a man unless it is absolutely necessary."

"Will you please tell me why you do not try to get me out? It must be nearly morning."

"It isn't nine o'clock. I thought it was late, myself; until I heard the clock strike down in Minster."

"What did it strike?"

"It struck one, for half-past eight," answered Dick promptly.

"Or half past anything else, or really one, and I am sure it will strike two next. Why *don't* you do something?"

"I have done a lot of things. You're unreasonable," replied Dick. "I have laid plans which would make Napoleon green with envy, and in a few minutes I shall— Hist! I think it is about to happen."

Dick dropped into his shadow, and the next instant Ivan burst from the path, running high and holding his skirts nearly to his waist. Close behind him was the smaller keeper, running low, and gaining at every step. Just as he was passing Dick, he reached forth to seize his quarry, Dick tackled as four years' coaching had taught him how, shut the keeper's knees together as with a vise; and the next moment they were struggling on the ground, Dick uppermost, and the keeper breathless from shock, mental and physical. Ivan tried to

assist, became tangled in his skirts, and fell in a heap on the keeper's head, which had a tendency further to delay the man's recovery. As soon as Ivan had seized the keeper's wrists, Dick took one of the ropes and bound him securely.

"Where is the key to this building?" he asked in a gruff, muffled voice.

"I haff id nod," answered the Austrian thickly.

"Where is it?" demanded Dick.

"Te other keeper haff id," growled the man.

"Just for that, Willie, youse gits a gag in your mouth," said Dick, suiting the action to the word.

"Now, Belinda, just a little lift on the feet." Ivan sulkily lifted the feet of the tightly bound man, and after they had carried him a short distance into the bushes and had started to return, Dick threw his arm about his friend's shoulder, and exclaimed: "Gee, old sport, I haven't had so much fun since I sophomored the freshmen."

Ivan made no reply, but started to remove his disguise. Dick, who had failed to notice this, continued after a moment's pleasant recollection: "Now, Ivan, just pike out in the other direction and trail the remaining sleuth to his doom. He ought to be heading this way by now, if they have any plan to work by at all."

Ivan sat down on the grass, elbows on knees, chin in hands. "I go not forth again," he stated. "I was taken by surprise and twice was I nearly captured. See—my robe is ripped crossways and also up and down."

"What do you care?" argued Dick. "It don't belong to you."

"I care not for the robe!" returned Ivan angrily. "I say damn to the robe! But think of my shame if found in the garb of a woman—of a cook."

"That is true, Ivan," said Dick in a low sad tone, affecting to give up all hope. "I do not ask you to risk yourself further and I fully appreciate the noble sacrifice you have already made. I should never have asked you in the first place if I could have seen any other way. No, not even in the holy cause of friendship, would I have asked you; but it was to save the good name of an unfortunate girl whose only crime is poverty and—"

"I shall do it, no matter what happens!" cried Ivan, springing to his feet.

"Nobly spoken," said Dick, lifting his hat reverently. "Ivan, you are a true hero, you have conquered yourself. He who conquers himself is— I've forgotten the rest, but it just fits the occasion. Now, while you are recovering your breath, I have one small favor to ask of you. This poor girl inside is nearly distracted. It would comfort her a lot if she could hold my hand, just for a minute. You see how high that small opening is. Would you mind kneeling under it for a second; while I stand on your back and reach my arm through?"

"This is too much! I have stooped to become a woman for you; but I refuse to put myself beneath the heel of any man."

"As a figure of speech, this phrase has a most hu-

miliating significance; but literally, there is nothing to it. I have myself been beneath the heels of eleven men at the same time, and they were applied with emphasis, and not with the loving care that I shall use—or I'll stand on my toes, just to please you."

"There is no sense in it. Think of it—me in a woman's garb, beneath the heel of a man!"

"Great guns, you have told me a hundred times that for countless generations your line has been ground beneath the heel of tyranny. Look what grand training this was; and anyway, there is nothing in this to wound your dignity. I would gladly kneel and let you stand on me and put your hand in; but it wouldn't answer the purpose. Even in the dark, hands are purely individualistic and she wouldn't get any comfort out of your hand. Haven't you ever been in love?"

"No, I have never stooped to selfish love. My love is for the entire human race."

"This is the age of specialists, Ivan, and if you would concentrate your love on just one woman, it would pay a heap sight bigger dividends. But this is only a bit of sentiment, and I shall not urge you. You have already proven your friendship. Go and decoy the other—"

"I have put my hand to the plow," sighed Ivan, "an extra furrow will not matter."

Holding his skirt bunched in front of him, Ivan stalked to the den and, as though preparing for the guillotine, knelt beneath the opening. "I am ready," he said bravely.

Dick had been forced to bite his lips at Ivan's prep-

arations; but as the fullness of his sacrifice came over him, he patted Ivan on the head and said with sincere feeling: "I'll square up for this, old boy, if we both get out alive."

He placed one foot gently on Ivan's shoulder and the other on his hips, and reached his hand through the opening. "Can you reach my hand, dearie?" he asked.

A few hours earlier the girl would have vehemently denied having the slightest desire to hold his hand; but great changes had taken place during her brief term of imprisonment, and Dick was playing a much larger trump than he was aware of. "Yes," she answered with a little catch in her voice. "Oh, Dick"—this was the first time she had ever called him Dick, and yet he did not notice it—"Oh, Dick, this is such a comfort. You won't leave me again until you get me out—will you?"

Ivan twisted his neck and looked up anxiously.

"You know that I never wish to leave you again," answered Dick, and Ivan's expression of anxiety deepened; "but I'll have to let go in a minute to capture the other keeper."

Ivan's head drooped in relief.

"You must be careful not to be hurt," cautioned the girl.

"Don't worry," scoffed Dick. "I can take care of myself. We have one guard safely tied and you will be out again on the next down. I wish you could climb up and look out. It's great sport."

Ivan was anxious to bring things to a close and began to squirm.

"Oh, I do want to be out; but I shall be wretched again as soon as you let go my hand."

"Do you smoke?" asked Dick. "That's a heap of comfort."

"Of course I don't," she replied indignantly.

"Don't get cross about it; I once knew a Sunday-school teacher that did. Here, cut that out!"—to Ivan who had begun to jostle up and down.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I shall have to go now—sweetheart." The word came falteringly, and Dick waited with apprehension.

"No, don't go yet," and Dick's heart gave a leap of gladness; but just then Ivan's patience reached its limit, and he rolled over, leaving Dick suspended by the arm. He gave a last, hasty squeeze, and dropped to the ground.

Ivan had risen to his feet, and Dick grasped his hand warmly, slapped him on the shoulder, and said dramatically: "Forth, Ivan, forth to glory!"

Ivan started forth to glory but it was evident that his armor was composed mostly of resignation.

"Are you still there?" asked the girl.

"You can count on me being here until you are rescued," promised Dick.

"Can't you—find—something else to stand on?" was the next question.

"There isn't a single thing here," he replied; "but keep a stout heart. It will soon be over."

After a short silence she asked: "Why did you want to see me to-night?"

"To say good-by," answered Dick soberly.

"Good-by?"

"Yes, I am going to leave home for good to-night."

Alaska, Africa, the headwaters of the Amazon, flashed before the girl's vision. "Where are you going?" she asked in a low tone.

"To New York," he replied somberly.

"Oh," she responded with a rising inflection.

"I am going to work," he continued as though work was an adventure which few had undertaken and none survived.

"Work?" she questioned in amazement.

"Yes, I shall start in poverty and rise to wealth. I don't mind the work; but I can't bear to leave you. We've had bully times, playing boy and girl, haven't we?"

The girl was forced to swallow. Even New York seemed a long, long way off, now. "Yes," she answered.

"Well, I, at least, won't forget them," he said.

She waited a moment and the darkness seemed very empty and the wall very thick. "Dick," she called, "can't you give me a cigar, just to hold for company?"

Did he laugh? He did not, he winked his eyes rapidly and tossed a cigar at the small opening. At the third attempt it slipped in, and he asked: "Did you get it?"

"Yes, it fell right at my feet. It is awfully damp in here."

"Mushrooms need dampness," he replied, with what she considered inexcusable irrelevance; but the next moment, he whispered, "Silence—some one is coming."

He dropped into the shadow and soon the vague outline of a man approached, walking slowly and humming a foreign air. Dick had dropped so suddenly that the man had passed through the patch of bright moonlight and reëntered the heavy shadow before he had time to examine him; and as he arrived at the proper distance, Dick tackled, threw him to the ground, placed his hand over his mouth, and instantly rose.

"Great Scott, Emil," he exclaimed, as he helped the prostrate man to rise, "I didn't know it was you. I beg your pardon, old man."

"Pardon?" the German exploded. "It is not a cause for pardon. This is *nicht* a way a guest to treat. For you, I haff always the deepest affection and respect had; but this, I can not forgive id!"

"Now, listen, old chap," said Dick soothingly, as he placed his hand on Emil's shoulder. "I don't want you to say anything you'll be sorry for. I am in a peck of trouble, and I took you for an enemy. There is a girl in this, I shall explain all; but— Here get in here and don't breathe until I tell you to."

He seized Emil without ceremony, jerked him into the clump of bushes and forced him to the grass, just as Ivan crossed the patch of moonlight, taking long walking strides. Immediately after him came the keeper on a run and for the fourth time, Dick made a grand-stand tackle.

As they rolled on the grass, Emil sprang out to lend his forgiven friend assistance. Ivan, who had turned, saw him, and thinking him one of the opposing force, rushed at him. Emil took Ivan for the "girl in the

case" and thought she had gone insane. They grappled fiercely and became so engrossed in their private war, that Dick, who had caught a Tartar, nearly lost his campaign. The keeper was large and powerful, and had seized Dick by the throat in a grip which he could not throw off. Dick struggled skilfully, struck his adversary in the short ribs, and sought to twist himself free; but the gray was turning to black by the time that Ivan recognized Emil, and they rushed to Dick's relief.

In a trice the man was tied hand and foot, and Dick, finding little difficulty in making his ill-used vocal cords rough and coarse, demanded the key.

"I trew id away," growled the man.

Dick searched him in vain, searched the other man, also without success, put a gag in the mouth of the new captive, dragged him into the bushes close to his companion, returned to the den and stood gazing up at the small opening.

"Now, we are up against it," he said gloomily to his allies.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MACHINE RUNS OVER IVAN AND EMIL

IT is probable that no previous statement had ever been made in that group without calling forth an attempt to overthrow it; but this one was received in silent acquiescence. Ivan was absent-mindedly engaged in tucking his frayed skirts into the top of his trousers, and Emil was stroking the beard which twice that evening had revealed his identity.

As this supine acceptance of their desperate condition became apparent to Dick, he aroused himself and surveyed the den intently.

"Pshaw, this is an easy one," he remarked after a minute. "There is a trap-door in the roof. Here, give me a boost."

With their assistance, Dick found no difficulty in clambering to the flat roof, and in a moment, he had the trap-door open. "Are you all ready, princess?" he called gaily.

"Goodness, yes," she answered promptly; "but how can I ever get up?"

"That's another one," answered Dick, studying a moment.

He rose, walked to the edge of the roof, and said: "Here, Ivan, you're the taller. Help Emil up."

Emil did not wish to go. His physical proportions denoted strength rather than agility, and he was perfectly content to remain on solid ground; but Dick had the magnetic gift of stirring another to action before that other had time to form his own will on the subject. In college games and college pranks this gift had been exercised and developed until Dick had formed the habit of speaking as one having authority; and while he was still arguing in his mind the wisdom of the move, Emil found Ivan pushing at him from below, Dick pulling at him from above, and himself climbing to the roof to take an active part in some transaction, of every premise of which he was utterly ignorant.

Dick escorted him to the open hatchway, and called down cheerily: "Look out below. Now then, Emil, take my hand and I'll lower you."

"No," said Emil, recovering himself. "I go not into a hole, when I know not what it on the bottom has."

Dick drew back a pace, placed his arms akimbo, and eyed his friend scornfully. "And so I have nourished a coward in my bosom," he said in hurt surprise. "Do you mean to say that after all Ivan and I have done this night, you are going to flunk and spoil everything?"

"I am not a coward," said Emil. "I do not at any time flunk; but such a thing as this, it is not the duty of any man to do."

"Then I would suggest that you get down from the roof at once, return to the library, get a book on statistics, and find out the exact number of brave men who

have deserted their comrades in the moment of their peril."

"I am not deserting my comrades," protested Emil. "I do not wish to. I wish only to remain with them, and not to descend into a hole on to I know not what."

"Will you kindly inform me why you insisted on coming along?" asked Dick with polite hauteur.

"I did not insist," earnestly explained the bewildered Emil. "Merely a quiet stroll in the moonlight I was taking, suddenly one whom I thought my friend leaped on me from ambush and hurled me to the ground, while another friend in the guise of a woman, attempted to tear out from my face my beard. Then—"

"It is unnecessary to give your unabridged biography," interrupted Dick. "Will you, or will you not assist me?"

Emil looked into the murk of the den and hesitated. "Yes, I will go," he said, "but I know it will be injury."

Without waiting for reconsideration, Dick hurried him through the hatch. "Spoken like a man," he said approvingly. "Now clasp hands with me and seize my wrist with your other hand." With his left arm stiffly bracing him, Dick lowered Emil into the gloom as far as he could reach. "Now, let go—let go! It is only a foot to drop. Let go!"

"I can nothing with my toes feel," cried Emil, whose mental processes were logical, even in moments of stress. "Pull me up again, there may be a pit here or an old well."

"If I pull you up again, it will be to bite your nose," said Dick angrily. "Let go! Do you think I'm a der-

rick?" Emil dropped, and Dick asked kindly. "Did you land all right?"

"Yes," replied Emil; "but I strained my nerves. It was an awful moment before I—"

"Now then, princess," hurried Dick; "put your hands on his shoulder. Emil, you take her foot and lift her, as if to mount a horse. That's right, now straighten up. Take a firm grip on my wrist." A quick lift placed her on the roof beside him. "There you are. Now then we're ready for the descent."

He hurried her to the edge of the roof. "Here you go! Ivan, take her in your arms."

"Oh, Dick," she hesitated, "I'm afraid my skirt will catch."

"Pshaw," said Dick impatiently. "Well, then, take it off; but I shouldn't think you'd worry about tearing a skirt at such a time as this."

"You stupid thing! I'm not afraid of tearing it; I'm afraid it will catch on the edge of the roof."

"I'll fix that—you just sit down and I'll push it over. Now then, don't mind Ivan. He's half woman-hater, and half cook. Come now."

He lowered her carefully, Ivan received her as though she were of fragile glass, and as soon as he had placed her on the ground, Dick swung himself beside them, saying: "Hurry now, it is getting late."

As they started along the path which led to the Burton grounds, a howl came from the bear den: "Here, here; come and let me out!"

Dick was a commander about to consummate a coup. Individuals were no longer of moment to him save as

they furthered his plan. "We can't bother with you now," he answered with lofty abruptness.

"Oh, this is an outrage," moaned Emil. "I will in the morning in this old bear den be found. I will be disgraced. I will be—and you said you were my friend!"

Dick saw that something was due Emil, and going close to the den, he said slowly and distinctly: "Emil, be sensible. In order to get you out, it would be necessary for one of us to go in. Whoever went in would have to stay. It requires two to finish my plan. Ivan is perfectly willing to assist without argument. If you did not intend to do my bidding in this matter, you had no business to force yourself on me. I shall rescue you as soon as I get time. This entire evening, outsiders have been begging me to rescue them until my patience is exhausted."

"But it is damp in here, and there is nothing to sit on."

"It is not customary in this country to fit up bear dens with Morris chairs and cozy corners," rejoined Dick. "Now, I can't waste any more time. Be a sport!"

Dick turned away; but Emil was not yet resigned. "Here," he called, "wait; I refuse in this vile spot to remain."

"All right, then," answered Dick stoically, "come on out. I don't want you to remain."

They hurried along the path until they reached the high fence at the point where an opening in the hedge had formerly served the girl as a wicket.

"I never in the world can get over that fence!" exclaimed the girl.

"You will have to," answered Dick shortly. "There is no knowing what your aunt has started by this time. Men may be watching or searching the front and back roads. They would never think of watching here. Therefore here is where we must enter."

"Oh, I don't know what to do," cried the girl. "Father will never forgive me if he discovers where I have been or whom I have been with."

"Then climb this fence at once, and keep him from finding out."

"He was to go to some kind of banquet to-night; but I am sure that it is terribly late and—"

"Well, he don't live here anyway, does he?"

"Of course he does."

"Your aunt said she might telegraph him. I thought—well, who is your father, anyway?"

"I suppose I shall have to tell you now. William Burton is my father. I only pretended to be—"

"Well, then, who is the old party who is always trailing you?"

"Why, she is my father's cousin. I call her aunt and she is awfully good to me; but—"

"Will somebody please stroke my ears!" cried Dick. "Why, it's as plain as this fence. It always was plain, only I was so taken up with you that I didn't care a rap who you really were. Oh, this is rich—this is a joke on every one! And to think that uncle—"

"It is not a joke," protested the girl. "It is terrible.

I am ready to go insane, and in just one more minute, I shall cry!"

"None of that," cried Dick in alarm. "You can't afford to do that until after the rush is over. When you get safe in your own room, just let everything go, have a good cry, then a good laugh, and you'll sleep like a top. Have auntie in and tell her the whole story. I'll wager my life, she's game. I like her the limit; but let's get over the fence now."

He studied the fence for a moment. "Confound those spikes," he said, referring to a row which lined the top. "Hunt me a stone, Ivan. Now, a little boost." He reached the top of the fence, pounded down the spikes, and said merrily: "Uncle must have thought your clan traveled in air-ships. Now, then, Ivan, pass her up."

As soon as the girl had been helped to the top of the fence, and had looked down on the opposite side, she shook her head. "It is no use," she said. "I can't get down on the other side."

"Oh, ye of little faith!" murmured Dick. "Here, you sit steady while Ivan makes his ascension."

With Dick's help, Ivan climbed up by means of the horizontal pieces to which the boards were nailed, and was then lowered on the Burton side.

"Just stalk off a little way to make sure that no one is watching," whispered Dick craftily, and then leaning close to the girl, he said: "I hate to say good night. Are you sure you can get into the house?"

"Oh, yes, I shan't have the slightest trouble about

that." A quick change came into her face. "What shall I do about Bayard?" she gasped.

"As soon as Emil is rescued, he comes next on the list," said Dick without hesitation.

"If you only will, I shall thank you all my life," she said.

"And the rest of it is, that I shall stick around so close that you won't have to use long distance," he added. Then his face sobered and he said: "I want you to tell me one thing before you go. I have told you I loved you and have asked you a dozen times to marry me; but you have never paid the slightest attention. I want—"

"This is no time to talk nonsense," answered the girl in a low tone, which refused to be light. "I scarcely know you, you know."

"You do, too: you knew me at first sight, and after all we have been through to-night, you know me better than any one else in the world; but," he suddenly said as a new thought struck him, "how did you know that my name was Dick?"

"Why, I found out all about you the very day we met. You don't suppose that I should have trusted you the way I have if I had known no more of you than you told me yourself, do you?"

"All I knew of you, you told me yourself; but I should have loved you if I had only seen you through a telescope. What is your first name? Honest, now."

"Kate, or rather Katherine."

"I might have known that also, it was always my favorite," and he slipped an arm about her. She drew

away from him, and they nearly fell from their narrow perch.

"This is preposterous," she said when he had steadied her. "To think of sitting on top a high fence at midnight and—and—"

At this juncture Ivan returned and reported that all was well; so Dick was forced to bring his venture to a triumphant ending, even if that ending meant a painful separation. He stood on the upper cross piece, and made her put an arm about his neck; then he put his arm about her waist and lowered her until her hands grasped the fence. During the operation their lips met, moist and warm; but neither spoke of it, and soon Ivan had placed her on the ground once more.

"Such a night!" she exclaimed.

"Such a beautiful, beautiful night," echoed Dick, and then sighed. "Good night, sweetheart, good night," he called softly after her as she disappeared in the shadows.

"Now help me up quickly," said Ivan.

"Ah, Ivan, this is ever the way with life. Just as we get a peep into Heaven, some one grabs us by the coat-tail and jerks us back. Now, I shall lower my leg and you climb up on it—you can't get a good grip without jumping. Can't you hang on to it? That's it. Now climb until I can reach your hand. Oh, rats!" as Ivan slipped back.

"What shall I do?" asked Ivan in distress. "I can not climb back."

"After to-night," said Dick philosophically, "I perceive that it is possible to be a great scholar without

knowing what to do at the right time, or how to do it when pointed out."

"But what shall I do?" repeated Ivan, who coveted no new theories at that moment. "I can not climb back."

"Then you will either have to stay there or go around."

"But I may be seen and discovered."

"It is not a bad bet," admitted Dick; "but life is all a chance, anyhow."

"Why are there no cleats on this side of the fence?" demanded Ivan. "If I had known that I should not have descended. Oh, why are there no cleats?"

Dick was contented with his night's work, and he answered calmly: "Doubtless in building this fence, my uncle overlooked your present requirements. The fence was erected, you know, to keep people out, not in. Cleats, as you call them, are only necessary on one side of the fence. Therefore their absence on your side is in no way remarkable. They were probably put on this side in order to make it more difficult to remove a board from the other side. From this side, you perceive, a board could be knocked off easily—"

"This is terrible," said Ivan wildly. "Think of my position. I refuse to remain here. You must—"

"My dear Ivan, this is not a case for argument or debate. It is beyond my power to produce cleats through force of desire. It would be foolish for me to join you as we should then be in the same boat; while now I am in a position to rescue you as soon as Emil and the dog are attended to. I shall get a rope,



Then he lowered her until her hands grasped the fence

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free Emil, send him here with the rope, while I turn the dog loose. Then I shall return and if—”

“Do not leave me,” begged Ivan. “Consider my position—I am on the domain of your enemy. He has guards patrolling it, and maybe dogs! What shall I do?”

“You have several good plans,” said Dick reassuringly. “You could either follow this fence until you reach the street; or curl up right where you are and wait until I return. Taking the possibility of spies into consideration, I should remain here if I were you—at least until later. As soon as it is discovered that the girl has returned, the watchers will be recalled.”

“But what if I am discovered?”

“You are still wearing the cook’s dress: tell them that you are crazy; and in the morning I shall call at the station and release you. Good-by, I won’t be long.”

Dick dropped to the ground and Ivan said bitterly: “This is called a free country; but it is damnable! I hate it! Sooner would I live a thousand years in Russia, than one year here. I shall never again have anything to do with women!”

“Now everything is all right,” said Dick. “As soon as the blame can be laid on a woman, the sky begins to clear. Honestly, I’m sorry to the quick, old boy, and I shall return as soon as possible. Keep a stiff upper lip, and it won’t seem long.”

Dick really did feel sorry for Ivan; but with all that had happened to cheer him, tugging at his heart, and with much still to be done, he was forced to tear himself away, which he did at a brisk trot.

Under a blue light all is blue, under a red light all is red, and so each little human of us sees a different world, lighted by the light of his own nature. Dick and Ivan had taken part in the same series of events, and yet how different they had appeared. To Dick, like the beautiful movements in a fairy game; to Ivan like the somber action of a deepening tragedy.

The same moon which made Bannington Park a magic isle to Dick made the orderly Burton grounds a ghastly wilderness to Ivan, and furnished Kate with a clear soft illumination, as she opened the side door and entered the house unseen.

Is life after all but a game, and are we always only children? Will the time ever come when we shall look back to the joys and sorrows which seemed so wonderful or so terrible, and smile half wistfully at the innocence with which we accepted the semblance for reality?

CHAPTER XX

THE ROVERS RETURN

IT was now eleven o'clock: Richard Bannington had concluded his interview with his private secretary, and Higgins had just assisted him to the library, his intellect receiving its customary amount of blame because there was still some pain in Mr. Bannington's foot.

"Higgins, I wish it were cold enough to have a fire," complained Mr. Bannington, fanning himself.

"Yes, sir, it would be pleasanter," acquiesced the butler.

"But it would be damned unnatural and probably cause a lot of sickness," said Bannington shortly, intimating that the butler purposed using underhanded means to produce such a condition. "I wish my nephew had as much sense and steadiness as young Lorrimer," continued the old man.

"Yes, sir," said Higgins in a mild, injured tone.

"What! What do you mean by such impertinence?" demanded Bannington, who used the same voice in talking to himself as he did when addressing one of his servants, and scolding the servant who failed to answer when spoken to, or who answered when he was merely thinking aloud.

"I merely meant that by the time that Mr. Dick

begins to settle down and goes into business with you it will take a lot of worry off your mind and—”

“A lot you know about business—or worry either, for that matter,” interrupted Bannington. “As soon as Dick comes in, I want to see him. It doesn’t matter what time it is, I want to see him. Do you hear?”

“Certainly, sir. Yes, sir, I shall tell him.”

“Seems to me as if he ought to be in by now.”

“Yes, sir, I should think so.”

“You should think so! What business have you to think about my nephew’s actions? I wish you would learn your place before you get too old to be of any service at all.”

At this moment the door-bell rang violently. Higgins stood in surprised inaction. “Why don’t you answer the bell?” cried Bannington. “Do you intend to keep them waiting all night? Hurry!”

The old man continued sitting erect in his chair with his eyes turned anxiously toward the door until the two Austrian keepers entered, leading Emil, whose raiment was sadly disarrayed.

“Sir,” he cried indignantly, “I protest me against such treatment! Never was I like this before treated! I come with your nephew to his native land as a guest of him at his invitation, to assist him in the propagation of the scientific laws of—”

“Careful, careful,” cautioned Bannington; “you are getting among the breakers. Now go slow and don’t sputter so.”

“I have behaved myself with decorum while in this house, but this evening yet, while I was walking in

the park for a stroll, I was set on and thrown to the ground, hurled into the den of an absent bear, dragged forth by these two ruffians—”

“You are discharged. You haven’t sense enough to be hanged for murder,” said Bannington to the guards, who stood in stupid silence,

“But we only obeyed orders,” ventured the larger keeper.

“Orders!” scoffed Bannington. “I told you to capture any women you found on the grounds and drive off all men who looked like tramps or socialists.”

“Yes, sir,” said the keeper, “but we did capture one woman and shut her into the building; and then a strange female of large proportions did race through the park, and we chased her to a certain spot, a man leaped on us from ambush and she turned and sat on our heats and—”

“It must have been Miss Burton!” exclaimed the old man with a grin.

“We were tied and bound fast, and into our mouths was a gag shoved and we were thrown into the bushes—”

“Who did all this?” demanded Bannington.

“We can not say. It was done with great swiftness, but this one helped. We heard him talk. Then the large female and one of the men took the girl from the prison and put this one there, and went away.”

“Oh, this is all nonsense,” said Bannington. “You are just making up a story.”

“No, it is the truth. After a while we rolled over back to back and untied each the other’s tongues and escaped,

and brought dis one to see vat you vould make wit him."

"Higgins," called Bannington, "pay these men a week's extra wages, and turn them loose. I don't believe a word they say, but they've been put to some trouble."

As soon as the men had left, Emil, who was still smarting, began: "It was not intentional that I entered into this, but your nephew—"

"Sir," interrupted the old man, with a grave politeness, which entirely concealed the amusement he felt at Emil's plight, "believe me, there has been a great mistake. It was impossible to find Americans who would accept the kind of work I wanted these fellows to do, and it is evident that they did not understand my instructions. I realize that under the circumstances apologies are entirely inadequate, but as that is the best I can do, I offer my most abject apology."

Bannington held out his hand and Emil grasped it, bowing low, as his habitual good humor returned. "Sir, he said, "I hasten to accept it, and to assure you that you have done all that a gentleman could. Now, with your permission, I shall retire myself and put in order my attire."

Emil started to leave the room, but Bannington, who was nervous because of Dick's absence, suddenly had a whim for company, and said: "If there isn't any God, how can there be any sin?"

"Sin?" repeated Emil, taken by surprise. "Oh, well, now, sin is merely a term which for convenience we use to call an action which is not at present a proper one. What is for you a sin, is not always for me a sin. Sins

differ with times and places. Murder is still looked on among the savages as a great virtue. Suicide, even among so civilized a people as the ancient Romans, was as a heroic act regarded. The Spartan boys were encouraged in the killing of slaves in order to do away with the inborn prejudice against taking a fellow-human's life. The czarovitch of Russia is yet to-day taught to indulge always his own desires, none about him being permitted to controvert him. Sin is—now my idea of sin is doing something to harm another. What I am able to do entirely as an individual can not be a sin. Providing I have none at present in me interested, and guard against having any offspring, I can abuse my own body as much as I please, even to the taking of my own life; but as long as my act is a part, even a small part, of the social life, then I am not to consult myself only, but society. Judged by this rule—”

“You’ll have to own up that without God, good would be unthinkable.”

“Not so. Without experience, good would be unthinkable.”

“Don’t let me keep you up,” said Bannington a little testily.

“That’s right, I have yet some packing to do. I wish you good night.”

“Good night,” said Bannington, frowning slightly.

Emil left the room, refreshed and contented. His little talk had brought back his familiar poise and the evening’s incidents were as remote as the early Greek tragedies. Bannington sat brooding: “Still has got some

packing to do," he muttered after a few moments' silence. "Then the boy really intends to go. Oh, I can talk him out of it yet. If boys were to begin doing the things they intend to do, the globe would crack in the center. It seems to me that the older I get the more I feel like a boy. 'Twould cause a panic if they only knew what I was thinking of sometimes." He chuckled. "They think that all I think of is money. I don't want that German to go, either. He amuses me, takes me out of myself with his fool nonsense. Only started him talking this evening to make him feel better after his handling and he went away purring like a cat, and I got so interested that I lost my temper a little without putting it on. Humph, he's as firm a believer as any one else—but that's not saying much."

The old man looked at his watch and sighed. "I wonder what Dick really did to him," he said with another chuckle. "Confound that boy, I won't stand for his bringing all manner of women on to this place. Those fool keepers spoke of a young one and a large one, besides Miss Burton. I'll wager Dick had nothing to do with enticing her here. That Burton blood is mighty poor stuff! How a mother as beautiful as hers could have so homely a daughter is more than I can say. I'm getting old, I'm getting in my dotage! I wish Dick would come in, I want to tell him he don't have to marry that frump."

A loud, angry rapping came at the door. He gave a start, composed himself and said sternly: "Come in."

The door swung back and Ivan, wild-eyed and with

his dress torn to ribbons, burst into the room. "Sir," he cried, "I am not crazy."

Bannington examined him skeptically: "Well, maybe you're not—I don't like to contradict any man point blank, but I must say you put up an awful good bluff at it. What are you pretending to be?"

"I shall tell you. This evening your nephew came to me and said—"

"Don't tell tales, don't tell tales," broke in Bannington. "That's one great trouble with all you laborless labor leaders; you are everlastingly reviling one another. You don't really want conditions to be any better, the more you can stir things up the more graft there is in it for you."

"But this was not for the cause," expostulated Ivan. "He came just as I had caught Emil in a weak argument—"

"He couldn't come at any other time, the boy is not to be blamed for that," interrupted the old man with unappreciated humor.

"Yes," continued Ivan, "and he said he had need for me. I went, willing to sacrifice my life if need be. He made me put on this garment, through the woods was I chased, with men was I forced to combat! Oh, you can not understand—it was terrible!"

"So that's the kind that you are, huh? Well, I don't approve of practical jokes, but I never could bear any one who got the worst of it and squealed about it afterward. Why don't you settle this with Dick, himself?"

"But this is not a joke, and I can not find him."

"What did you come to this country for, anyway?"

Ivan drew himself up proudly. "I came to this country, not to be disguised like a cook and chased through strange yards with dogs. I came to fight for liberty."

"Humph, that reminds me of something I once heard concerning Newcastle's demand for coals. If nothing will calm you but war, why don't you go to some country which is not free already?"

"You do not understand. This country has religious freedom, it has political freedom, but industrial freedom—"

"You needn't list them on my account. There is too much freedom already to suit me. Now, if I were you—and remember, this is only a suggestion—but if I were you, I should either get my dress repaired, or else take it off altogether."

Ivan had forgotten his appearance entirely. He looked at his tattered skirt and made for the door. As he opened it, he turned and said: "I shall go to your nephew's room and wait for him. When he returns, will you send him to me at once?"

"I have a little business with him myself, first," replied Bannington, "but I shall let him know that you wish to see him."

Ivan withdrew and Bannington shrugged his shoulders. "I should like to have that fool doctor live in this house, himself, and see how he would manage to have quiet. I wonder what the deuce Dick has been up to. That boy wastes enough executive ability to run the government. I'll find out about these women he's been having in the park as soon as he gets here."

At this moment he heard the voice of his nephew asking a question in the hall. He could not catch Higgins' reply, but heard Dick walking rapidly and firmly toward him. "Now," said the old man, softly but firmly, "now."

CHAPTER XXI

DICK LEAVES THE TRACK

"I WANT to ask you," began Bannington as soon as Dick was fairly inside, "why it is that artists, actors, and especially social reformers, are always so loose with women?"

Dick looked at his uncle in surprise. He was bursting with a confession, and at no time would he have expected such a question to come from his uncle. "Actors and artists, being of the artistic temperament," he replied, after collecting himself, "may properly be grouped in the same class, but social reformers are, as a rule, narrow-minded men with good intentions, who get stung with one particular social wrong, and swell up until they think that this one wrong, which is always merely a symptom, is the root of all evil."

"Aren't you a social reformer?" asked Bannington in surprise.

"I am a revolutionist," replied Dick with dignity.

"I beg your pardon," responded his uncle, with satirical obsequiousness, "but as I understand it, they are troubled a good deal the same way."

"The way of it is this," said Dick, settling to the subject. "We were all primitively free in everything so far as we possessed the physical capacity. As we evolved further from the purely natural, artificial con-

ventions sprang up. These protect a certain class at the expense of another class—I am speaking now of temperamental, rather than economic classes—”

“Pray continue, they are all one to me,” interposed his uncle, his face grave, his eyes beginning to twinkle.

“The emotional characters who imagine an ideal attempt to reach this ideal without taking into account their fixed position in society. They ignore criticism, they attempt to breast the waters of public opinion, they do the things openly which those who manufacture public opinion do secretly, and when the rabble turns and barks at them, they at first refuse to notice it, but gradually their sensitive natures become bitter and they rush into defiant excess. In the end, they trample on their ideals and attempt to harden themselves with unrestrained bestiality. In a word, they do not sin against the highest good in frank rebellion; they begin by opposing hypocrisy, but in the end they sink back to the lowest, going to the very slime of an age which had no conception of culture, and this is their undoing. Their appetites are no longer strong and discriminating; but erratic and degenerate. The beauty which they once sought with true devotion, remains like a ghastly specter to haunt them, and while it is impossible for human features to express the hell in which they live, their tortured eyes and sagging lips blaze forth like the red lamps of danger. They have taken up their own misery, but at the same time, society, itself—”

“I guess that’s enough,” said the old man soberly. “You’re nearly as bad as the German. A man can’t

ask you a civil question without having the human race or suffering humanity or society dragged into the answer. I suppose if a farmer were to stop you in a bridge crush and ask you why apples were wormy, you'd talk to him about society until you were both trampled to death."

"If trees are properly sprayed, fruit will not become wormy, but the individual is too careless. Apples are a social product, therefore society should guard her own by seeing that the trees are properly sprayed."

"I should hate to be as old as you are," said Bannington, shaking his head. "If I was sure that I knew everything, it seems to me that I'd be sort of weary of sticking around here any longer. I'd want to go to some new planet, and see if I couldn't hunt up something to wonder about."

"But, Dick, you've been out pretty late to-night, and I've something I want to say to you." The old man paused. His voice had become gentle and sincere, and his face showed signs of embarrassment. "It isn't so easy to say, but I was wrong in what I tried to make you do."

"No, you weren't, Uncle. I was wrong in refusing to obey your slightest wish."

Richard Bannington stared at him. "Well, it don't make any difference, now, you don't have to marry Miss Burton."

"But I intend to marry her," broke in Dick impetuously. "I want to marry her. I will marry her."

"What? You intend to marry that fright? the daughter of my bitterest enemy! I forbid it."

"You can forbid all you want to," retorted Dick, forgetting his contrite statement of a moment before. "I intend to marry her, and I shall thank you if you refrain from speaking disrespectfully of the girl I intend to make my wife, and whom you have never seen."

"I have seen her," said Bannington. "She is in no way suitable. She is one of these strong-minded creatures who will fuss a week to have their own way—"

"That will do," said Dick. "If you are merely seeking to stimulate me by opposition, it is useless, for my mind is already made up. I shall marry Miss Burton if it lies within my power to do so, and if you say another word against her, I shall simply walk away and leave you."

"You obstinate beggar, you! You take advantage of my weakness. I suppose you lured her into the park this evening?"—recalling the capture of Miss Burton and her subsequent release at his hands. "I know more of your pranks than you think I do"—Dick immediately thought that his friends had betrayed him—"but let that go for the present. Dick, you mustn't do anything hasty. I have told you exactly the shape we're in, and I hate to tackle the next few months alone. You're young, you have imagination and hope, and even if things go to smash, it won't be so bad if you are in with me. Thirty years ago, twenty years ago, even ten years ago, I should have welcomed a scrap like this; but if they get me down now, there is no come-back for me, and I hate to own up that I'm whipped."

If we land this Panama contract, it means a hundred millions worth of other business.

"You can't stand on the outside and realize how it all hangs together. It's like tenpins; you hit the head pin just right and you get them all; but if your ball starts a quarter of an inch out of line, you roll into the alley and don't get anything. They're watching us like crows watching a dying horse. If we bid too low it will show our hand, if we bid one dollar too high, we don't get a look-in. I have figured this bid at exactly two million, three hundred and sixty-five thousand dollars, and that's to the hair-line. Are you going to come in and make a last fight for it, or are you going to read of our failure in the newspapers? This is a man's game, Dick; will you come in and take a hand, or will you stand outside and chatter?"

There was magnetism in the old man's voice. Dick saw the situation in a new light. It was a man's game, he was tired of dealing with theories and longed to be in the midst of a fierce struggle. The quick movements of the evening, the matching of his wits and his strength against those of other men and against adverse circumstances, had entered his veins like rare wine, and he felt in every fiber of his being the call of his uncle's words—the call of class, the call of clan, the call of blood. He slowly kicked his toe into the thick rug, keeping his eyes on the process as though it was the one important consideration confronting him.

"Uncle," he said at last, "I'm all torn up. I want to go in with you; but I know we can never pull together. You'd treat me as if I were still a boy, and I can't

stand your overbearing ways—and I can't forgive the way you have spoken of Miss Burton. It makes no difference anyway. My plans are all laid, and I leave this house to-night."

"Yes, and in two weeks you will be back, begging for a new chance! I don't mean that, Dick. I know you are too infernally proud to own up that you were hungry until you had starved to death. And if you did go away and would ever need assistance, and I could give it, why, I'd want you to come back, and I'd make The Prodigal Son sound like a hard-luck story. We'd get along better than you think. I'm a cranky old fellow, I know, but I'm not so bad as I seem. You've formed your opinion of me from the papers, but you'd find me a lot different. Why, hang it, boy, I've chummed with you all the time you've been at school. I've kept track of your games—I've got a lot of fool rule-books locked in my desk now—I've even studied slang, so I'd know what you were talking about. I'm not a leech or a clam, I'm a human being, and I've had more fun out of your boyhood than I did out of my own. Marry this woman if you insist on it, marry the cook if you want to! but get into the harness, get into the harness, and it won't take long for work to knock the nonsense out of you."

There was a friendliness in the old man's voice, a frankness, a genuineness, that appealed to the boy, and he had to harden his heart. "My mind is made up," he replied, without looking his uncle in the face. "I told you ten days ago what I should do, and I don't change my mind without mighty good cause."

"What are you going to do for a living? You can't live on nine hundred a year."

The implication was stimulating. "You must remember that I am a mechanical engineer," said Dick, "and—and I also have a patent, and—hang it, I can live on nine hundred a year."

"A mechanical engineer sounds grand," said Bannington dryly, "but it takes some little time to reach the ripe fruit. What kind of a patent have you, a hygienic pipe or a skirt hanger?"

"I have patented a nut-lock," replied Dick crisply, as he unfastened a small trinket from his watch chain. "I patented this thing two years ago, but while waiting to get my patent, I became interested in sociology and forgot all about it."

"That's your usual way," was Bannington's caustic comment, as he examined the miniature bolt with growing interest. "This thing has some good points," he said after a moment. "Did you take out foreign patents, too?"

"Of course I did. I don't often do things by halves."

"That's true enough," admitted Bannington, "but you often burn them up trying to get them cooked. To be perfectly frank with you, Dick, this contrivance is clever; but there are always two sides to be considered before one gets enthusiastic about a patent. For instance, this nut-lock, one way or the other, would probably save the people of this country several million dollars a year—and the manufacturers of bolts and nuts would lose it."

"It would also save many lives—a loose tap is the cause of some of the worst accidents."

"Certainly, but I lumped in the lives with the rest, at five thousand apiece. Now the question is, can we jump the price of bolts sufficiently to make more profit off of safe bolts, which are not lost, than we can off of unsafe bolts which will have to be replaced? Cutting out all sentimental stuff, that is the proposition. That nut-lock won't do you any good alone, but if you will come into the plant, we'll make it our big specialty, and you'll not only start off by making a little easy money on royalty, but you can save as many lives as you want to—through the prevention of accidents."

The old man was trying to be genial. He saw the calm determination in his nephew's face and attempted, by means of a facetious cordiality, to bring Dick back to the boyish simplicity of which the old man was so fond, and in which he found the best temperature at which to mold and temper his nephew.

Slight as the pretense was, Dick felt it. It had an odd effect: his conscience thoroughly approved of the course he had planned, and yet, in some vague way, it hurt him to have the old man use diplomacy when power was the only force that appealed to him. "Don't ask me again, Uncle," he said soberly. "It is undignified on your part, and it hurts me to refuse. I can not accept. Come, let us shake hands and part friends. I feel nothing but good-will toward you and as soon as I get a good start, I'll come back and we'll hold a regular reunion."

A sudden storm of sorrow and pain swept over the

old man. For years all the softness and tenderness of his nature had flowed out in secret to the boy, and he had expected to give it a wider vent as soon as they were bound together by a mutual purpose. This was the spring of youth at which he had hoped to drink, so that even in his age, a strong, rich current of life might surge through his veins. After the long years of repression he had experienced an awkwardness in opening his heart to the boy, and yet he yearned toward him with a great love which, now that it was dammed by Dick's self-confidence, rose up in his heart with unexpected strength, choking him, and making his hands tremble.

For years he had dreamed of having Dick as a chum, working with him, playing billiards with him, taking long walks with him, having a little real fun to crown his hard life, as the dainty mistletoe nestles to the rugged oak—and now the boy was going away again. Age can never understand why youth always longs for the lonely quest; youth can never understand why age still craves the close, warm touch of true companionship, and yet nature, whether her steps be taken blindly or at the dictation of a divine purpose, makes no mistakes; and though the path leads through wilderness and desert and along frowning cliffs, yet does it wind ever upward toward the unseen country of understanding love.

Richard Bannington clenched the hands that trembled against his will, and when he tried to speak, his voice was broken and husky. "Dick, you're—you're not going away? You're not actually going to leave

me? Why, Dick, you were named after me, and if you were my own son, I couldn't love you more. When your mother died, your father couldn't seem to bear the sight of you for a while, and I—why, Dick, you can't imagine how I used to pet and fondle you—when no one else was about. I know I have a rough tongue, I've had to be rough, but not with you—no, I haven't been rough with you. Why, Dick, I love you like a father."

"And if you were my father, it is too late for me to change now," replied the boy, still true to the hauteur of his years.

"Why?" asked the old man.

"Well," answered Dick, finding it easier to control himself by looking at the floor instead of at his uncle, "I have rented an office and fitted it up—this was what I've been doing the last few days. I have engaged a bookkeeper and a general office man; I have had my stationery printed, my card put in the different trade papers, my plan of—"

"Why in hell didn't you incorporate yourself and be done with it?" flashed the old man, catching the first wave of his reaction. "You don't take an overly modest view of your own worth, at any rate," he continued sarcastically, and then the wave having passed on, his voice softened again. "But all this don't amount to anything—you can swing all this into the plant. Why, this one government contract will mean more than twenty years hard labor on your own hook. There will be millions of bolts used, and you can have all the opportunity you want to test your patent."

"It is tested—it is perfect, and I shall push it myself. I am in earnest, Uncle," holding out a steady hand; "good-by."

"And so this is really the end of all my plans for you?" said Bannington in a level voice, but refusing to see the hand which Dick held out. "When your father died and turned you over to me, I swore I'd do my best, and I have kept my oath. You haven't been a bad boy, Dick, but hanged if you've been a restful one. I doubt if I ever made a plan for you that you didn't kick down, jump over, or crawl through. I don't want you to go, Dick. Can't you say something better than good-by? Haven't you a single kindly thought for the business your father started and worked for?"

Dick hung his head for a moment, then straightened up and said in a friendly tone, but with a trace of pride: "Yes, I have. Now listen, this nut-lock of mine is all right. I have tested it under water, on a jerk movement, and under alternating pressure, and it is perfect. You specify it in your bid, and I'll give you the right to make it without royalty. It is the Dickie Nut-Lock and the name is copyrighted. It will get you the contract; and—and God bless you, Uncle, and the plant, too. Good-by."

He grasped the old man's hand and shook it rapidly. Tears were welling up in his eyes, but he turned and hastened from the room before they had a chance to moisten his cheeks.

The old man sank back in his chair, his hands clasped tightly across his breast, and his breath coming in quick catches, closely akin to sobs. For many minutes

he sat thus, fighting a battle of the soul. Had some of the many who used his name so familiarly and so disrespectfully, seen him at this moment—well, probably they would have taken it as an exceptional example of fitting punishment. They also have missions to perform.

“Foolish, impulsive boy!” murmured Richard Bannington; “he has taken my heart with him. Oh, he’ll soon get enough of this fighting alone! No, he won’t; it’s not in the breed. Confound those tramps who led him astray!” A grim, proud smile crossed his lips. “From the appearance they made this evening, though, it doesn’t look as if they did much of the leading.

“He had no right to turn down the old plant this way—it bears his father’s name. That is a good patent of his, too. Hanged if I don’t specify it in the bid! I can’t root the boy out of my heart, and I’m not going to try. I’ll specify it in the bid and then when he gets tired of fighting alone, I’ll tell him it was his nut-lock that secured the contract, and he can come back without pocketing his pride. The Bannington pride is a damned bothersome asset. Poor old Dick; I was like him, myself, once. Lord, it seems a hundred years ago!”

For a few minutes he sat in reverie, old thoughts blending with new, and then he shrugged his shoulders as if to cast off a load. The Bannington blood was, in truth, fighting blood, and the old man had won another battle. Already his private war was laid aside, and the great struggle, on which depended the life of the plant, was beginning to attract his attention. He

knew there would be many a lonely hour for him, but he also knew the lonely hours which he had conquered in the past. "Higgins!" he called with incredible fierceness. "Higgins, Higgins, Higgins! I want to go to bed."

As the startled butler entered the door, the old man rose and tested his foot on the floor. "Higgins," he said in a friendly tone, "my foot is very much better. I think that to-morrow will be the last day of your tyranny over me."

And Higgins, who had again sunk to the comfortable level where it was not necessary for him to think, replied respectfully: "Yes, sir, I 'ope so, sir."

CHAPTER XXII

COMRADES STILL

IT is not to be supposed that Dick would go about the selection of an office in a conventional or orthodox way. Neither is it to be supposed that he would go about it in a slipshod or haphazard manner. Certainly not. The most natural supposition is that his selection would be the working out of a private theory, and this would end the supposing, for no one who knew him would ever waste time in guessing about one of his unvoiced theories.

Dick had several things to take into account, and the first was that he was under obligations to provide for the comfort and welfare of the three friends who had enlisted under his banner. He had guaranteed nothing, but there was an understanding all around that his money was to be freely used in propagating the principles for which they stood, and now that he had come on dry times, through no fault of theirs, he made it a point of honor to include them in his new arrangements.

When' he had gone up to his room after the interview with his uncle, he had found Ivan sitting bolt upright on its most uncomfortable chair, his feet resting on the tattered remains of the cook's gown, and his arms folded across his breast. Dick's heart had

been very full as he had hurried up the stairs to the old room where so many of his boyish pranks had been planned, and he paused on the threshold, his eyes winking so rapidly that at first he did not see the rigid figure of his former ally.

When he did see him, his face lighted and he crossed the room rapidly, holding out his hand. "Ivan," he said feelingly, "I am rejoiced to see you safe and sound. How did you escape from the Burton yard?"

"I was chased out by a dog, a shepherd dog," replied Ivan, without changing a line in his somber face. "Our friendship is over."

"Oh, Ivan," said Dick sorrowfully, "I can't give up any more friends to-night. I don't blame you for feeling cut up at the way things turned out; but I had no expectation of it, and I did the best I could."

"You untied the very dog which chased me from the yard. It was that same shepherd dog."

"Collie," murmured Dick. "Did he bite you?"

"No, he would run at me, snarling in a low voice, act as though he was going to spring, and then turn aside. There was not one stone on the ground. I kept my eyes on the dog and fell into three rose bushes. That was the ending. You led me into danger and then deserted me uncaring, to turn loose on me a dog."

"And even worse was I treated," said Emil, who, having heard the voices, had come in without attracting attention. He had his hat on his head and his battered traveling case in his hand. "I was left in the filthy den of a bear, where I remained until the

brutal keepers had untied themselves. They refused to free me until I cursed them in German, telling them that I intended to blow up with dynamite the house. They could not find the key, and lowered to me a rope. I put it under my arms, the noose slipped and I was nearly strangled. When we all reached the ground, I tried to escape with dignity, but they caught me the second time I tripped, and dragged me before your uncle. He is of great sincerity. He apologized. Now I leave."

Dick's trunk was already packed, and as Emil talked, he had been hastily changing his clothes. His attire was in too extreme negligee to give proper effect to the pain which evidenced itself in his boyish face, but when Emil had finished he smiled sadly, and said: "Even the rats know when to leave a sinking ship, and so I do not blame you. I shall not ask you to follow me into the new venture which I am about to undertake. The chances are about ten to one against me, and you have already put up with a lot of disappointment on my account."

Dick paused and his two listeners looked troubled. They were accustomed to his quick temper, but were unprepared for this frank admission of weakness, or the sorrowful undertone in his voice. "I want to tell you, though," continued Dick, "that I did the best I could for you. I hurried to the den and found Emil and the keepers both gone, then I went to unfasten the dog. As soon as he started for home, I hurried back to Ivan, remembered that I should need a rope, and

ran around to the den to get it. When I returned to the fence, Ivan was gone.

"I don't ask your forgiveness, but I do say that I'm mighty sorry that things turned out as they did, and that what you have helped me do to-night is one of the greatest acts of my life, and I shall never forget it. Any time or any place that I can do you a service, just let me know and you will see whether or not I am ungrateful. I am leaving here to-night to start in a little business of my own. It will probably be slim eating for a long time, and I am glad that you do not feel called on to share it with me; although I did make preparations for you."

"Pouf, pouf, pouf!" exclaimed Emil, waving his hands in front of him and pursing out his lips. "What is a little thing like being dropped into an empty bear den? It is but a choke! Wherever you are willing to go, I am willing to follow, and I am fat; I can starve a long time. Pouf!"

Ivan held out his hand. "It was not your fault; you did what you could, I forgive you freely, and will not desert you as long as I have life. When do we start?"

Now Dick was mightily cheered at the simple loyalty of his two friends, and it was after this that he remembered the count, and looked into the hall and seeing that there was a light in his room, had knocked on the door. The interview was short and unpleasant: the supercilious smile of the count, which did not appear on the surface, but seemed to lurk behind his polite expression, peering out at each little corner

to sneer spitefully, was much in evidence, and Dick was glad when it was over. But he told Lorrain that while he was at present in no position to be of assistance to any one, he would be at his service the very moment he was capable of rendering any. He begged Lorrain to send him his address, as soon as he was settled, and gave him his new business card. As Lorrain read, "Mr. Richard E. Bannington, Mechanical Engineer, President of The Dickie Nut-Lock Company, Suite Three, 96 Nathan Street, New York City," his supercilious smile removed its veil and seemed to swagger. But only for a moment, after which he bowed, thanked Dick, said he would guard the card carefully, and they shook hands. Lorrain told him that his arrangements for leaving the next morning were completed, and as Dick joined his other two friends, he gave a sigh of relief.

Nathan was an odd little street, finished long ago, tossed into a vacant nook on the East Side, and forgotten. It had originally been intended for a residence street; but was now used for anything that pleased the fancy of him who happened to find, and decide to make use of it. It was of all things heterogeneous, and therefore quite adapted to the mind of Dick Bannington.

He had furnished his offices rather hastily, and he and his staff found much to do when they took possession at seven o'clock the next morning without having tasted sleep for twenty-four hours. But what was sleep with a new project, only awaiting a few finishing touches for its launching? They turned to with

a will; but it required a week's steady labor to arrange the two-room suite to the satisfaction of the cautious president of the Dickie Nut-Lock Company.

Dick was much changed: his lips were set, with the lower one protruding a little in fixed determination, his eyes appeared to gaze into empty space, but the drawn brows above them denoted concentrated thought; and Emil and Ivan had found it necessary to adjust themselves a little to fit in with the new order. Their questions were usually ignored, and when Dick conveyed a request to them it was put into the form of an order, a brief, comprehensive command, and they felt instinctively that much was staked on this new venture, and gradually adapted themselves to its requirements.

The requirements were boring rather than wearing. As soon as the offices were arranged, there was nothing to do but sit in the outer office behind a brass netting and look intelligent and busy. As no one ever came, this occupation soon lost its novelty, and while Emil improved his opportunity by reading heavy books, Ivan was forced to ease his mind by frequent sighings. Dick spent his time in his private office, and, as much of it was devoted to pacing up and down, his retainers found much mental exercise in speculating on his ultimate intentions.

They ate breakfast and supper in the outer office, where Emil and Ivan also slept, Dick and the faithful Mulligan sleeping in his private office. The great wall safe in the outer office with "The Dickie Nut-Lock Company" artistically painted on it, was in real-

ity an ice-box; an expensive letter-filing cabinet was arranged to hold table furniture; while comfortable bunks were arranged beneath the counter which formed the lower portion of the partition which separated the office force from possible clients. They were really quite cozy—as far as their material bodies were concerned. Generally they studied East-side conditions during the evening, or took part in some meeting held for the elevation of the submerged tenth, which takes such an impersonal and complacent view of its own condition.

But with the second week came a great yearning in Dick's heart to see the girl again. They had made no plans for a future meeting, for young love, being eternal, deals only with the present; and one of Dick's knotty problems was the discovering of a way to meet her, which would be apt to have no disastrous complications. He had every reason to believe that her father and her aunt would offer strenuous objections, and he felt a justifiable hesitation in suggesting another clandestine meeting, even if he had had any safe method of conveying a message.

But even when one is worried and in addition to this, wills it with all his might, one does not thoroughly age in a single fortnight, and so the Saturday night of the second week found Dick en route for Minster. He went alone and he went with an open heart, trusting that the gods would provide him with an opportunity, if only he place himself in the best position to take advantage of it.

From Minster, he hastened to the little road which

ran past the rear of Bannington Park. He hurried up this until he found the oak tree post-office, knelt with a beating heart, ran his hand through the hedge, and with much effort into the hole near the base. His heart stopped still and then gave a mighty leap—his hand had touched a note.

Hastily drawing it forth, he tried to read it in the darkness; but strain his eyes as he would, it was impossible to make out a single word, and he dared not strike a match, for fear of attracting attention. He hurried up the road until back of the Staunton place, and then struck the match. A light, fitful breeze was blowing, and the match went out. The second, third, and fourth did likewise. Then he used care and was able to read the heading. The words, "My Dearest," in Kate's well-known writing affected him like the touch of a live wire, and the fifth match went out. It mattered but little, the words continued to dance before him, filling the world with wondrous beauty and surpassing joy.

After reveling in this glorious sensation for a time, he had a curiosity to see if the note contained other items of importance or interest. He searched pocket after pocket, but did not have a single remaining match, and fell to cursing his luck in truly melodramatic style because he had not carried the note toward Minster instead of away from it.

He did not waste much time at this; but thrusting the note into the pocket over his heart, he retraced his steps at a brisk run. When he reached the Burton place, he stopped, went up close to the hedge and took

a careful survey. The note seemed his commission to storm the castle and take his lady away by force; but a little reflection showed him the wisdom of reading the remainder of the note first, and he continued to run until he reached the first street lamp.

Here the president of the Dickie Nut-Lock Company paused and taking the note from his pocket, he read it with the light falling on a face whose beaming fairly put it to shame:

"MY DEAREST—A full week has passed and I have not heard from you and do not know where you are. Oh, I want so much to see you! I have such loads and loads of things to say. I reached home safely, and went to bed without meeting auntie. When she came in a little later, she gave a gasp of surprise but I pretended to be asleep, and she did not say anything until after father had left the next morning. Then she told me that I had frightened her terribly; but did not go into details concerning her own misadventures of the preceding evening, nor question me beyond reason; and she still thinks I merely took a terribly long walk with Bayard. She told me that if I ever went walking after dark again it would be without her consent, and I was so glad to escape without a confession, that I gave her my promise.

"Every morning I have put a note in our post-office, and every afternoon I have come and found it unanswered; and have taken it out and have pretended an answer; but it is no fun. At first I scolded you; but as the days passed and I became more lonesome, my notes have become more frank; until now I feel no embarrassment in writing that I want to see you more than any one else in the whole world.

"Perhaps, if I really thought you would read this,

I should not dare to write it; but this is the last note I shall write until I get an answer. I shall leave it here and come every day, but I shall not take out the note until I hear from you in some other way. I scarcely know whether I am writing to you or to myself. I wonder where you are and what you are doing.

“Yours truly,

“K.”

“P. S.—What a perfectly nonsensical ending!

“And yet I fear it fits the note.”

After reviling himself at his lack of forethought in not having provided himself with suitable stationery, Dick tore a leaf from his note-book, filled both sides with glowing sentiments, and on a fresh leaf gave her a few details of his new career, ending up with the simple statement that while it was against his will or intention, yet the concern of which he was president would probably be antagonistic to both her father and his uncle—an item which might have added to the amusement of these gentlemen—and therefore he suggested that she arrange to meet him without causing any uneasiness on their part. He offered the plan of her pretending to mope until her aunt noticed it, and then to affirm that it was owing to the discontinuance of her evening walks.

In justice, it must be confessed that Dick was prepared to evince a noble submission to this state of affairs, provided the girl saw as he did. Just they two on the little back road, with the soft shadows all around and the soft starlight above, was a much more attractive conception than a formal call in a formal drawing-room, with a formal auntie always within earshot; and

if circumstances compelled them to resort to the romantic, rather than the conventional, why he was prepared to be resigned in his heart, even if he did feel called on to express verbal regret.

He hurried back to the oak tree, pressed his lips to the note in place of a stamp, thrust it into the opening, and returned to New York very much uplifted in spirit.

There was no answer to the note on the next night, or the next, or the next; but on Wednesday evening, he found an answer which he read at once by the electric torch with which he had provided himself.

There was no heading to the note and its tone was a little chilling. It began by saying that if she had ever supposed that he would read it, she most certainly should not have written so silly a note, and that she could not understand how he could have taken it seriously. She next informed him that she did not feel justified in doing anything of which her father, who had always indulged her, did not approve; and that it was totally unnecessary for her to pretend to mope, as she had really been ill and her aunt had suggested that she resume her romps with Bayard, which would undoubtedly include a short walk in the twilight. She ended by saying that she hoped he would succeed in business; but did not fear his competition with her father. There was no signature, not even an initial, and Dick turned off his torch and sat down dejectedly at the side of the road.

He sat there for over an hour and he was very doleful, until at last his pride asserted itself and he turned

on the torch once more, shading its rays with his coat. He wrote across the bottom of the note: "I hope you enjoy your evening walks—with Bayard;" folded it roughly, and returned it to the opening.

As he straightened up, he noted with surprise that the high fence had been removed.

"There'll be some more high things taken down before I'm through," he said grimly, as he strode off toward Minster. He had no expectation of seeing that location again for a long time; but he took no backward look. And this was a mistake, for the branches of the trees made a beautiful arch in the brilliant starlight.

CHAPTER XXIII

LEARNING THE LEVERS

IN the outer office of suite three, ninety-six Nathan Street, there was a telephone booth, and in the booth was a private exchange, the single wire of which led to the private office of the president. It was Ivan's duty to answer the calls, and if they were of sufficient importance, to connect the inner telephone. It was a task which did not strain his power of endurance.

On the Saturday following Dick's disappointment, Ivan answered the telephone about ten in the morning, and was told brusksly to put the president on the wire.

"Who is it that wishes to speak to him?" asked Ivan calmly.

"Is he there?" the voice asked, ignoring the question.

"My instructions are, not to bother him with any unimportant matters, and it will save time if you give your name and business," replied Ivan in the same placid voice.

"I am William Burton of the National Steel Mills, and I want to speak to your president at once," replied the voice with every symptom of assurance.

Dick was placed on the wire. "Well?" he demanded shortly.

"I want to know something about these nut-locks."

"Who is this talking?"

"This is William Burton of the National Steel Mills."

Dick gave a start, but instantly recovered himself. A smile of triumph played about his lips for a second, and then his face took on a keen watchfulness, and he answered easily: "Well, what is it you want to know about the nut-lock?"

"I want to know all about it."

Dick laughed. "I'm afraid I haven't time to gratify you to that extent. Have you never seen the Dickie nut-lock?"

"Never heard of it until yesterday. What is the price of it? How promptly can you deliver? In what quantities, and where are—"

"If you will send a man over, he can see a demonstration; or, if you prefer, I can send a man to you. We have an appliance which instantly shows the security of the lock, and—"

"Send him over at once."

"Whom shall I have him ask for?"

"Have him ask for me. I want to see what it is. If I decide to take some—but I'll wait until I see it. Send him at once, will you?"

"As soon as possible," replied Dick politely, after which he hung up the receiver, lit a cigar, clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in his comfortable office chair.

"Mulligan, sit on this chair beside me, I want to consult with you," he said to the dog who was stretched out at his feet.

The dog jumped up on the chair. Dick put his hand on the rugged neck of his four-footed counselor, and proceeded to discuss the subject. "Why does William Burton of the National Steel Mills desire Dickie nut-locks? That's the question, Mulligan. Where did he hear of them, how did he become interested in them, why does he want to know about our ability to deliver? I wish I was more familiar with my own business, Mulligan. I wish I knew how to get some information that I am much in need of. I wish business was more like foot-ball.

"Now, the only thing that looks reasonable to me, is the most nonsensical thing of all. Which sounds rather paradoxical, does it not, Mulligan? Well, to be brief, so that William B. will not be kept in the stew too long, the only explanation that looks right to me is that my respected uncle did include the Dickie nut-lock in his bid, for some occult purpose of his own; the Burton bid was lower but the far-famed and justly celebrated Dickie nut-lock was not included; and so his bid was turned back to be rearranged with regard to these most important safeguards.

"Can it be, Mulligan, can it really be, that after all our beloved country is really conscientious once in a while? Can it be, gentle one, that the pamphlets with which we showered Washington have, some of them, fallen on good ground and are already bearing fruit? If this be true, Mulligan—and do not forget, lest your ready patriotism be too early aroused, that this is merely speculation—if this be true, then verily I say unto you, there is hope in Gilead. If the government

refuses to consider bids which do not include Dickie nut-locks, then I have them by the short hair. Yea, Mulligan, by the short and tender hair, and my grip is what is technically called a peacherino! Oh, Mulligan, if this be true, and you are aware that I am not given to impulsive enthusiasms, then there will be rejoicing among the daughters of men when I lead William B. and my respected uncle around by their noses, making them do fancy little dance steps.

"You can't do good work without a theory, Mulligan, and this is the theory upon which I am going to base my acts. I have nothing to lose but my chains; which is a thoroughly orthodox position; but I wish, just for a month or so, that I had a little larger capital. I have a wonderfully clear vision, Mulligan, and the funny part of it is, that I never knew it before. I can see way ahead to the point where the two princes of the steel industry throw themselves at my feet and beg for mercy. And they shall have it, my sedate philosopher, they shall have it in large measure—but at a price; yes, oh, yes, at a fair and pleasing price.

"Remember this, Mulligan, it is William B. who is anxious about Dickie nut-locks, not I. In case this slips my memory for a moment, I want you to come before me, in the spirit of course, and look at me with the same godlike calm which is at present gracing your features. As a bit of a compliment, friend wrinkle-face, permit me to say that you have Buddha and the Sphinx looking like a ballet, and peace of mind is just as contagious as grippe. I'll admit to you at this time, that details were never my long suit. No scheme

of mine that I ever handled alone ever went amiss, but as a rule I left the details to supernumeraries—and they, in turn, left them to luck. This time I am going to put all my eggs into one omelet—and I am going to eat the omelet. Don't forget now; you are to be a constant reminder that William B. is more anxious about Dickie nut-locks than Mr. Richard E. Bannington.

“But I wish to Heaven I knew exactly why!”

After studying the matter a few minutes longer, Dick touched the button on his desk, and Ivan entered obsequiously. It had been arranged from the beginning that practice being of great importance, all transactions during office hours should be carried on with the utmost precision.

“Mr. Michaelowski,” said the president in cold, distant tones, “I want you to take a demonstrator to the offices of the National Steel Mills, and ask for its president. Show him fully the workings of the lock, pointing out its great money- and life-saving qualities, but with the most careful tact, avoid disclosing any information concerning our manufacturing plant, the number of men in our employ—in fact, any of the private affairs of our business.”

“Yes, sir.”

“When you leave them, go to some other house and give, or at least attempt to give a demonstration. Pick out an important house, you have plenty of time before you start. Pick out a good one and it will be well to pretend that you have an appointment. You will probably be watched when you leave the National, and it is advisable to give them to understand that they

are entitled to only a small part of our time. Don't make a call on Burton, remember; go through the demonstration as briskly as possible, explain why you did not come earlier, and that you have other concerns clamoring for attention. You understand, play the game bravely; the other fellow don't know what you have buried—and neither do you, as far as that goes, so swing as wide as you want to."

"What is their address?" asked Ivan.

Dick stared at him. "Address?" he repeated. "Do you for one minute suppose that the president of a concern like this has time to hunt up addresses?"

Dick was a finished actor. During his short life, he had already taken many parts, and he occasionally took his present one so convincingly that even his satellites were impressed. In the present instance Ivan looked as though he had received a slap.

Dick's ready sympathy prompted him to a temporary relaxation. "That's all right, Ivan," he said in a kindly, albeit a somewhat patronizing voice, "you can't become perfect in a week. When you return, get a large apple pie, and we'll spread ourselves a little. Remember, it doesn't make the slightest difference whether or not the nut-lock pleases Burton. I don't care a hang if he never buys one; but I do care about his finding out anything about my business. That's all, and good luck to you."

Mulligan again stretched himself on the rug. Dick placed his heels on the polished surface of his new desk, and continued to speculate on the probable outcome of his deal with William Burton. It is not

asserted that the force of gravity has any influence on the human mind, but the fact is well known that this same mind is much more easily controlled when its owner's body is tilted forward than when it is tilted back.

Dick suddenly slapped his thigh, dropped his feet to the floor, and sat perfectly erect. "I wonder if she could have meant that as a hint?" he suddenly asked the empty air.

"She said that her romps with Bayard would certainly include walks in the twilight. What a chump I have been! I'll go out there early to-night and see if those walks in the twilight are taken on our little back road. Great Scott, I'm so slow I'd get heart failure trying to elude a snail!"

It was after one before Ivan returned, and as usual, luncheon was eaten in the private office of the president for fear that the ever-possible customer might arrive at an inopportune time. The closet where they kept their staple groceries opened on the hall and was originally, or at least formerly, used for fuel. It adjoined Dick's office, and he had had a doorway cut through and fitted with a handsome glazed door upon which was inscribed the dignified words, Vice-President. It was arranged that if any one had the poor taste to intrude on their noonday meal, Ivan was to slip out through the closet and inform the adventurer that the president was engaged in private conference and could not be disturbed for an hour. The ruse had heretofore been unnecessary, but the feeling of security gave an added zest to their meals.

During these meals, social barriers were leveled and they discussed matters of general interest, but as soon as this particular luncheon was finished and the dishes washed and put away, Dick said: "Now, Mr. Michaelowski, you may report to me upon your assignment."

"He was pleased with the nut-lock; I could tell by his face," said Ivan. "But he did not ask many questions about it, nor did he order any. He asked the price and I gave him the price up to ten-thousand lots in the common sizes, telling him that at present the price on all larger lots had to be referred to the president. He asked me all kinds of questions about yourself and the business, but I did not heed them. I merely pointed out additional qualifications of the nut-lock. He is not a patient man. He said he would have you call in person."

"He did, did he?" asked Dick. "Well, I wonder who he thinks he is. I call in person! Well, his impertinence is certainly refreshing. You did well, Ivan. Now I am called out of town this afternoon to examine sites for tunnel terminals. Make no appointments for me but take names and numbers of all who call. That is all."

Dick reached Minster before seven o'clock and was soon walking out the back road in the direction of Bannington Park. He was feeling very much alive. The fact that the National Steel Mills was nibbling at his bait was joy enough for one day; but in addition, he was by this time convinced that the incidental line in the girl's note was really its message, and that he was

practically going to an appointment. His heart played a merry march and his springy stride kept pace to it.

He walked on the side of the road farthest from the park, and by the time he reached the Burton place it was nearly dark. He did not pause, but hurried on, hoping either to overtake the girl or else meet her on her return.

He had just reached the center of the rear hedge of Bannington Park when he saw Bayard coming toward him in the dusk. He and the dog had established terms of neutrality, if not actual friendship, and Bayard came up to him without hesitation. Dick patted the dog's head effusively; but the next moment he saw the girl coming toward them on the opposite side of the road. He was just about to cross when he saw that she was not alone.

Drawing himself close to the trunk of an adjacent tree, he waited breathlessly until she had passed, but could not identify her companion, except that it was a man and that it was not her father.

Bayard had resumed his position as advance guard, and Dick stole stealthily after, without questioning the propriety of the action. Dick was healthily primitive. The pair in front walked at a fair pace, while Dick was apprehensive of being discovered, and so did not come close enough to overhear their conversation.

When they reached the rear gate, he heard the girl ask a question at which the man laughed. Dick knew the laugh; it belonged to Claude Lorrain, and as the gate closed behind them, he ground his teeth in the darkness.

With hands thrust into his pockets and bitter thoughts in his heart, Dick plowed down the road to Minster, a luxurious rage steaming in his heart. Any one but Lorrain! a cad, a hypocrite, a libertine—Dick had used most of the terms of reproach before he arrived at the first Minster street lamp.

Associated ideas invariably influenced him, and this lamp recalled the night on which he had read the note which had so uplifted him. Without a pause he countermarched and returned to the oak tree at an increased speed.

"If that were meant for a message, and I was fool enough to miss it, and she did walk alone expecting to meet me; why she has a right to flaunt even that parasite in my face!" he exclaimed, his intentions being better than his logic.

He reached his hand into the opening in the oak, and found a note. He crossed the road and walked a hundred yards to a clump of bushes before reading it. It was the same note at which he had become incensed on his previous call. Across the bottom, he read his own message: "I hope you enjoy your evening walks—with Bayard;" and beneath this in the girl's hand, were the inscrutable words: "Thank you."

He turned off his torch and sat down to think, but found himself in no mood for it. The supercilious face of the count insisted on intruding; and at last, he turned on the flash and scribbled: "I regret that one dog did not prove sufficient escort."

Slipping the note into its former resting-place, Dick started toward Minster. The crude barbarity of his

message was exactly the caustic balsam he needed and by the time he had reached Minster, his face was completely turned to the future once more. He very rarely protracted the wake over a dead past.

As the lamp again impressed itself on his vision, he stopped short and raised his right fist. "It was an evil day for old William Burton when his daughter threw me over for such a creature as that," he said solemnly. "If I get him where I want him, I shall crush him as I would an egg."

As the National Steel Mills was rather a large egg for the Dickie Nut-Lock Company to crush, this speech, made on a lonely back road, may be looked on as one of those boyish threats of a strictly private nature, which will ever and anon burst from the oldest of us. Still Dick brought his right fist down on his left palm as though he fully meant it.

When he reached the station, he considered the advisability of making a call on his uncle. The fact that this would take him by the front gate of the Burton place was offered in the general argument; but in the end he shook his head and continued on his way to ninety-six Nathan Street.

Entering his private office, he found among the fictitious entries with which his desk bulletin was daily covered, the bona fide announcement that William Burton had rung him up, had expressed dissatisfaction at his absence, and had requested a personal interview as soon as possible.

"I should like to have it now, Willie, right this minute," he said disrespectfully, as he gave the demon-

strative Mulligan a rough fondling; "but I guess you will have to wait until day after to-morrow. I am just as anxious for this meeting as you are; but I have better self-control. I'd give a six-wheeled buggy to know just how to hook you, Willie."

He laid the bulletin down on his desk and looked severely at the bulldog, who continued to wiggle his stumpy screw tail expectantly. "I suppose you think that in addition to the multitudinous cares of my public and private life, I can still find time to take you for a nightly walk?" he indignantly asked the dog.

Mulligan licked his lips to signify that this was his firm conviction, and Dick resumed in the same accusing voice: "For the life of me, I can not see where you get your assurance from. You toil not and neither do you make a bluff at it, and yet you expect your meals at the very minute, which is nerve enough; but in addition you require personal service from the president of the Dickie Nut-Lock Company—which is the limit of all things!

"Remember, now," he said as he picked up his heavy stick and held it at a threatening angle, "if you chase any cats or fight any dogs without my permission, I shall write a copy of the general orders across your back with this wand of my authority. Now, come on."

The unassumed sincerity of the dog's welcome and his unshakable faith in him had fully restored Dick's poise, and they set forth on their nightly ramble very jauntily.

A dog has no place in the present social economy,

and many there are who wonder at the tenacity with which the dog-lover continues to exist, but this is the whole secret: he, himself, knows he is a four-flusher, many others know it and use it to their personal advantage; but his dog refuses to believe it unto the very end. He can slip down the ladder of life knocking off a bit of cuticle at every round, but there at the bottom sits his dog, wagging his tail in laudatory greeting, and eager to lick every sore spot and make it well again. That is the whyfore of modern dogs. They don't really pay dividends, but they are about the only intelligent creatures left who do not spend half their time preaching. We don't want to be preached at, we want to do the preaching ourselves; and so the wisest of us keep dogs. Dogs can listen the vocabulary out of a lodge member, and continue to maintain every appearance of interest. It is not asserted that there is any connection between the two facts; but it is certain that when every one kept dogs—real dogs—there were very few divorces.

CHAPTER XXIV

JOCKEYING AN EXPERT

THE next morning at eleven, Dick called up Mr. Burton and told him that he could see him, or his representative, on the following afternoon.

"I want to arrange this at once," replied Mr. Burton in a peremptory voice.

"I am sorry, but my entire afternoon will be taken up, and to-morrow from three to four will be all the time I can give you for several days."

"Do you know to whom you are speaking?"

"I supposed I was speaking to the president of the National Steel Mills," answered Dick angrily. "Who is this?"

"This is the president," replied Burton, "but I thought that if you knew the importance of interesting a concern like ours, you would—"

"My dear sir," interrupted Dick condescendingly, "I am not seeking to arouse a demand for the Dickie nut-lock among the manufacturers, but among the actual users, of bolts, and have already convinced the government of their positive necessity. Will you call to-morrow?"

Dick waited a moment with a grin on his face. This was certainly fun.

"I shall let you know later," said Burton, hanging up his receiver with a bang.

Dick touched his bell. "The next time Mr. Burton calls," he said to Ivan, "tell him that I have been unexpectedly called to Washington to consult with the secretary of war. Use the formula for being frank, and use as much of it as he will listen to."

Dick had arranged a complicated set of formulas for Ivan to use and much of their time was given to the practice of it.

At three o'clock, Burton called again, and Dick had the satisfaction of hearing over his own telephone the dialogue which took place. Burton did not have Ivan's unswerving placidity, and the contrast was sharp and also amusing—to Dick.

Dick discovered that afternoon that the secretary of war was not in Washington, and it bothered him considerably, but the next morning his joy was excessive when the morning paper said that the secretary had been hastily recalled to the capital; while in another and less conspicuous column, mention was made of Mr. Richard E. Bannington, of the Dickie Nut-Lock Company, having also been called to Washington on urgent business.

An old college friend of Dick's was now a reporter on one of the leading papers. In common with many other old college friends, this chap still owed Dick a little money and was glad to become a modest publicity bureau in order to square accounts.

"Talk about your wizards!" exclaimed Dick in delight. "I guess that will make Willie B. understand

that he is not playing the scrubs, all right, all right. Be composed, dear friends, be composed. As long as your humble servant has his hand on the steering wheel you will ride as safely as though seated in a church."

Dick continued to gloat for a few minutes and then remarked to Mulligan: "That was what we term a coup, Mully, my son; but in the future we shall not consult with public officials unless we know where they are. We do not want to get beyond the bounds of commercial honesty. Now, that Milton chap is all to the good. I knew he was honest when I lent him that money—which suggests a new idea. A lot of fellows owe me money and the chances are that most of them are honest but do not suspect that I am down among the needy. The first leisure I get, I shall try to remember who some of them are and give them an opportunity to contribute a little something to my working capital. I shouldn't be surprised, Mulligan, if we wouldn't have to invent something new in the way of kiting before we have the steel people actually screaming for mercy."

The telephone bell rang. Ivan answered it and soon came in to Dick, who had whirled around to his desk and was examining some papers. "Mr. William Burton wishes to know if you have returned yet?" asked Ivan deferentially.

"That Burton is becoming the public nuisance!" exclaimed Dick, looking up from his papers. "Tell him that I am expected every minute, but that I have a large number of appointments for to-day. If he be-

comes profane, hang up your receiver gently. Don't answer the next call promptly, and when you do, beg his pardon and inform him that we are very much rushed."

About three that afternoon, Dick called Mr. Burton and said in the most amiable voice possible, and as though it were thoroughly understood that an appointment for a meeting that afternoon had been made: "I am very sorry, Mr. Burton, but I was called to Washington unexpectedly yesterday afternoon, and have been rushed to death since my return, so that it will be impossible for me to see you now, although I have tried to arrange it. Could you call the day after tomorrow, at three-thirty?"

"I don't intend to call at all," replied Burton explosively. "The matter is of slight importance, but just at this time, I was interested—"

"Oh, well, then," broke in Dick in a relieved voice, "if that is the case we can arrange things at some future time without any bother at all. I thought that perhaps your anxiety for a meeting had something to do with one of these government contracts. That's all. Good-by."

Dick hung up his receiver, touched his bell, and held a paper in his hand as though vexed at being disturbed in the study of it. "If Mr. Burton calls up again," he said briskly, "use the delay formula. The special facts are, that I am conferring with three men at present and that I expect to leave as soon as this interview is finished. Hold him as long as you can, but don't let him go until you put him on my wire. That is all."

Dick gave a sigh and leaned back in his chair. "I am beginning to see what there is about business that gradually absorbs a man. I have handed friend Burton a bunch this time which will soon let me know whether or not my original theory was the correct one. If he don't call me up within twenty minutes, I have missed the target. If he does, I have hit the bull's-eye and I have a deep-rooted suspicion that if this is the case—"

The telephone bell rang with shrill insistence, and Dick put his own receiver to his ear and listened eagerly. As Burton displayed impatience which rolled harmlessly from Ivan, Dick's joy increased and by the time Ivan was forced to put him on the wire, Dick was certain that he knew Burton's hand.

"Who is this?" he asked sharply.

"This is Mr. Burton," came the answer. "I am tired of fooling about this paltry matter and I want to settle it to-day."

"Impossible," answered Dick blandly. "I regret exceedingly to disappoint you, but my time will be taken up until six o'clock. Can't you make the appointment for day after to-morrow?"

"What are you going to do this evening?"

"I have an engagement at nine-thirty," answered Dick.

"Could you take dinner with me and talk this over then?"

"Why, I suppose I could"—Dick hesitated—"Yes, if you really wish it. Where shall I meet you?"

"The Astor House, six-thirty."

"The Astor House? Why, that is so out of the way," objected Dick.

"I mean the Hotel Astor, of course, forty-fifth and—"

"Oh, yes, that's all right; but we had better make it seven."

"Very well, then—seven sharp. That's all."

"He has swallowed the hook!" exclaimed Dick. "He is all fussed up because he had to give in a little. He will be in a cold, nasty temper. I shall have to watch him closely. I wish it were foot-ball, Mulligan; but I'm going to play a crafty game. I am so. Now he has to sign my contract, and I have to make him think that I am a good-natured young man, ambitious to succeed, guileless as a dove, and rather easy-going. You have no idea how this is running along my nerves. I always used to feel like this before a game, you remember, but I never showed it—and I won't show it this time."

Dick rose and took a turn about the room. "I've got to have a lawyer on that contract and here it is after four. The old ones will charge too much and be too careless. The young ones will all be gone home or else they'll be the drudgey kind without imagination. I have to have a corking contract and it has to be drawn up by a lawyer I can trust and who will trust me. Surely there must be a lawyer in this little village who is under obligations of some kind to me. Wait, wait; I'm getting warm! That thin fellow with the ruddy hair that I met at the mission on Avenue C. He's the boy—Terrence Mulchaey. He claims to be

Irish, the Irish claim to be witty. Now, where can I find him? He gave me a card, I put it into my pocket, and I gave that suit to a tramp printer." Dick flew to the door. "Emil, do you remember the printer who came here from Seattle to get a job?"

Emil raised his eyes from *The Modern Trend of Pragmaticism*, squinted them a time or two, and replied: "I do."

"Then go to him as fast as you can, get the card he found in the upper left-hand vest pocket of the gray suit I gave him—J. T. Mulchaey—telephone the address to me on the instant. Hurry!"

Emil's mouth opened to ask a question, but Dick had already rushed into his own office. Ivan's eyes held the light of suppressed excitement, it was plain that his sensitive nature was responding to Dick's nervous eagerness; but Emil had been engrossed in an intensely interesting passage, and was impatient at being disturbed. "What nonsense!" he muttered as he picked up his hat.

"Hurry!" cried Ivan.

"This is no kind of work for a man," growled Emil as he slammed the door.

Dick had hurried into his private office and pulled out a type-written paper which had been corrected and re-corrected until it presented a badly abused appearance. He ran his hand through his hair after having read it again, and said: "This is exactly what I want to get into the contract; this covers everything, and if Terry can just put it into legal form, I shall take great pleasure in making William Steel Mills Burton admit

that the way of the transgressor is hard. I hope Emil does not have to pass a book stand."

He turned and twisted in his chair, he walked to the window, he became so restless that Mulligan was finally disturbed and rose with a yawn to see if what was evidently a human crisis offered any opportunities to a rather bored canine.

"Mulligan," said Dick, seating himself and taking the dog's head on his knee, "we often speculate on hell. Suspense, that is what hell is. An eternity of suspense, an endless waiting in the dark, a thousand torturing questions, and no answer. That is hell—and I wish to goodness that Emil would hurry."

At the first tinkle of the bell, Dick put the receiver to his ear, and when he heard Emil's voice, he cut in without waiting for Ivan. Mulchaey was with a large firm with offices at Chambers and Broadway, and Dick immediately had Ivan call him. When Ivan announced that Mr. Mulchaey was on the wire, Dick gave a sigh of relief, and soon had things settled. Mulchaey agreed to be at his desk at nine-forty and to work all night if necessary, and to make no mention of the matter to his firm.

It was now six o'clock, Ivan was beginning supper, and Dick, having run the full circle, now found himself perfectly cool and looking forward with pleasure to his coming meeting with Mr. Burton.

"I wonder whether I'd better make this engagement at nine-thirty a business or a social one," he mused. In entering business, Dick had decided that it was war, and therefore entitled to no ethical considerations.

This candid attitude at the very start prevented his conscience from interfering with expediency, and left him free to plan his campaigns unhampered. He finally decided that he looked better in evening clothes and so chose a social engagement.

"I suppose the old cuss is a cold-blooded amphibian," he remarked genially to Mulligan, as he adjusted his tie, "but even at that I shan't keep him waiting but twenty minutes or so."

In evening clothes, Dick did not look like a member in good standing of the proletariat, but in spite of this, he felt a kindly approval of his reflection as he surveyed himself in the glass. "I trust the time will come when I won't have to keep my raiment in a fire-proof safe and an office desk; but you don't look like a hall-roomer, Dickie boy, not yet. And now, friend Burton, I shall seek to do ample justice to thy fair repast. Mulligan, I regret exceedingly that I can not take you with me, but owing to the present financial depression, the Dickie Nut-Lock Company is unable to afford a human watchman, and the rest of it is that I'll take you a nice long walk when I return. *Au revoir.*"

"Now, boys," said the debonair Dick, as he paused at the table where Emil and Ivan were enjoying their frugal repast, adding the sauce of philosophical discourse to the more material viands, "I want you to remember that in spite of appearances, I am making the economic fight of the age against the steel pirates. It is probable that in the future we shall be watched by detectives; therefore, be ye wise as serpents and in-

nocent as doves. See if you can locate any socialists who belong to the office forces of either William Burton or my uncle, and extract as much information as possible. Good night."

Upon arriving at the Astor, Dick was immediately conducted to a private dining-room, where he found a man with piercing eyes waiting for him. The man was of medium height, masterful hands, self-contained expression, and lips which appeared to be the trusty guardians of a strictly private entrance.

"You are late," said Mr. Burton, as soon as they had exchanged names and shaken hands.

"I beg your pardon," said Dick easily, "but you can readily understand the difficulties of starting a new business on small capital. I began in my own way, creating a demand for my services and product before opening offices. Now I find my organization inadequate to handle the office business, while actual orders come in too slow to keep my plant running."

"You are younger than I supposed," said Burton.

"People have been telling me that for years," laughed Dick.

"Well, let's get started," said Burton.

They seated themselves, and it was evident that Mr. Burton understood the arrangements for a conference at which food was to be incidental. He tried to make it entirely incidental. Each course was cleared away and the next brought in promptly, and then the waiters retired until summoned.

Dick, however, was instantly able to perceive that there was an art surpassing Ivan's in the preparation

of these courses, and as he was honestly hungry, he commended them cordially. In fact, he played cordiality as his longest and strongest suit, answered all questions frankly, but never seemed anxious about the sales of his nut-lock. He seemed to look on its future as assured, and confided to Mr. Burton, with pleasing naïveté, his intention to make his income as a mechanical engineer pay the expenses of establishing the nut-lock business. He unfolded so many plans, intimated so much already done in the creating of a demand, and appeared so youthful, hopeful, cheerful, and unsophisticated, that Mr. Burton was gradually disarmed.

Dick avoided final decisions as much as possible, but managed to give the impression that he was eager to land the National Steel Mills, if it would not withdraw him from the general field. He seemed to desire the control of his invention more than anything else, and Mr. Burton was very well satisfied with the result of their interview.

At last Dick looked at his watch and rose to his feet, saying: "Well, I have to be going. I'm afraid I'll be late as it is."

"But we haven't settled definitely as to our terms," protested Mr. Burton good-humoredly.

"Why, I thought we had," replied Dick in surprise.

"Oh, we have arrived at a mutually agreeable understanding; but in business, you know, especially my kind of business, a contract is regarded as the only thing binding. Shall I have contracts prepared?"

"Oh, you need not go to the bother," said Dick. "I'll slap one together to-morrow, and bring it to your office

about four-thirty. Now, I must hurry. I am very glad to have met you, Mr. Burton, and have enjoyed your dinner thoroughly. Good night."

"Seems like a bright young fellow; but too careless, too careless," thought Mr. Burton, as he also prepared to leave.

"Rather a decent old crustacean," thought Dick complacently, "but he wears too heavy armor. It hampers him; might do all right in a heavy fight, but in fencing it makes him too slow. Well, I think I have his future in my pocket; but first, we'll see how the attorney extraordinary for the Dickie Nut-Lock Company decides on the possibilities of my contract."

He found Mulchaey in and eager. "I am only doing assignments on a commission here, and have a right to handle as much business of my own on the side as I can," he explained.

"You make a pleasant noise to me," said Dick. "Now, I want this kept secret, and, to make it easier for you, I am going to pretend that it is merely a supposititious case. I want you to draw up a contract that would hold the imps of darkness, be written in simple language, and contain the stipulations found in this crude outline. Furthermore, this contract must be in my office by to-morrow noon."

Mulchaey was a young man, but he had an old face. His face did not light up, it clouded over. He adjusted his glasses and read Dick's draft. Then he re-read it, his brows drawn together. He folded it carefully and held it in his hand, looking at it a few moments. Then he opened it and read it again.

"I can do it," he said calmly, "but there are a lot of things left out that would make it stronger—"

"You leave them out of yours, too," said Dick.

"Yes, but they are necessary for definiteness."

"You don't say!" exclaimed Dick smiling. "Well, you understand that this outline contains exactly what I want and if you knock together a contract that will stick, it means that you have done the best day's work of your life, and you have a nice, long night to do it in."

"All right, I'll make it stick, but I warn you in advance that the other party will not accept it."

"The other party thinks that I am weak-minded and that I am drawing up the contract without legal advice—and what is more important, the other party is in a sweat to get action. Perhaps you have not heard of the panic, but we are in the midst of one, and whenever I find a panic out alone this way, I capture it and make it work for me. I won't bother you any longer as I have another important matter to attend to. So long."

The other important matter was Mulligan's constitutional, and Dick attended to it without delay and to the complete satisfaction of himself and the redoubtable Mulligan, who had the pleasure of being insulted by a dog larger than himself and of being permitted to demonstrate his ability to achieve satisfaction—although not to the extent that, in his judgment, the case demanded.

CHAPTER XXV

STOPPED ON A COUNTRY ROAD

THE contract arrived before noon the next day, and after studying it for an hour, Dick decided that the only thing it lacked was signatures, and had Emil make two copies of it on his own stationery. Promptly at four-thirty he took them around to Mr. Burton and that gentleman read it carefully, touched his bell to have it sent to the legal department, looked into Dick's smiling face, and instead of having it reported, he signed and sealed it with the corporation stamp of the National Steel Mills.

"You will start your plant full force at once, will you?" he asked.

"To-morrow," replied Dick promptly. "All my men have had experience, and as the contract says, I shall run a day and a night shift."

"All right," said Mr. Burton. "And now to encourage you, I'll tell you that this is a hurry-up job on the Panama Canal. It has to be delivered by October fifteenth, and if you will continue to supply these nut-locks at the present price to ourselves, and four times this price to all others, I think I can guarantee to take your entire output."

"That is mighty kind of you," said Dick heartily, "and now I'll not bother you any longer."

After Dick left, Mr. Burton re-read the contract. "A queer article," he thought, "but it's typical of the boy, himself. After he goes to the wall, I think I'll offer him an opening, myself. He has the right stuff, but lacks training. I wonder what turned him against his uncle? I guess the old man froze him out all right."

Dick's face was rather grim after leaving Burton's office, and his fists were tightly clenched. "This is no longer a joke," he was thinking. "Unless I'm a fool, I have this situation on its own goal line—and it's my ball. Burton is in shallow water himself, or he would not be so anxious about so small a contract, figured down to the roots, too. Now, there's a man with a national reputation for astuteness, and yet he hasn't good common sense. His own office boy ought to see that there is mighty little profit in making nut-locks at the price I named him—an article which is sure to be in universal demand—and yet he meekly offers to take my entire output at the same figure. Well, who's next?"

Dick was in a thoughtful mood, which continued after reaching his office, where Ivan was beginning his preparations for supper. He put the contract into his private safe, along with a jumbled assortment of clothing, and sat studying the situation until Ivan called him to supper.

During the meal Dick was silent. Now that he had accomplished the first step in his plan, the immensity of his task took on a more distinct outline; and he doubted his ability to carry it through. But from thinking of

the father, he very naturally recalled the daughter, and, hastily finishing his meal, he crossed the town and took a ferry on his way to Minster.

He would have liked to have a talk with his uncle, and took a turn about the boat; but without meeting any one he knew. All the way to Minster, his face was grave; but when he started up the back road, business was thrown aside, and the rosy flag of romance was run up.

He found the note in the oak tree and walked on to his accustomed clump of bushes before reading it. By a young moon he was able to see that still another line had been added, and turned on his flash eagerly.

The line was: "I always did despise your judgment on dogs, you know."

Dick turned off the current and pondered. This had gone far enough, and he refused to continue firing off blank epigrams; but, after giving free rein to his outraged pride, he was forced to admit that he was extremely anxious to know the exact state of Kate's mind. It was ages since he had seen her, and dark ages, at that.

He could hardly bring himself to ask for a cessation of hostilities, for the very good reason that it was himself who had commenced them. With a sigh denoting undeserved ill-treatment, Dick rose in time to draw a low, sharp bark from the opposite side of the road.

The next moment a voice said: "Hush, Bayard," and the next found Dick crossing the road to the side of the girl.

"How you frightened me!" she said.

"I am truly sorry," said Dick a little stiffly.

"What were you doing," she asked, "studying some new bit of stupid impertinence?"

Dicked wished that she was again in need of a knightly rescuer. She always seemed at such an advantage in the piping times of peace; while he flattered himself that she had rather relied on him on that one night of action.

"No," he answered portentiously, "I had just decided that I would no longer engage in such nonsense."

"—quoth the very old philosopher to the giddy young thing," added the girl mockingly. "I don't think that living in New York has improved you. When you were a foolish boy I found you rather amusing; but now that premature old age has set her seal—"

"I want to have a serious talk with you," interrupted Dick, apparently determined to put himself in the worst light possible.

"If we all had the same wants it would result in a depressing stagnation," chanted the girl. "Do you suppose that I came out in this glorious moonlight to be bored?"

They had reached an open space, and the girl turned so that the setting crescent shone on her face. Dick looked at the face, and there were certain faint lines which did not correspond to the lightness of her voice.

"You have missed me!" he cried in frank surprise.

"Rather often, I should judge, from the notes," replied the girl, trying to turn it off.

"But why did you write such a mean note, after such a bully one?" asked the persistent Richard.

No comment was made, but strangely enough in the excitement of their unexpected meeting, they had turned about and were walking away from the Burton gateway.

"For pity's sake, don't catechize!" exclaimed Kate. "Why do men insist on asking the most impossible questions, when a modicum of analysis would give the correct answer?"

"Not this time," protested Dick. "If I were to analyze my head into a shredded biscuit it would not explain the inconsistency between the two notes."

"Oh, can't you see how it was?"

"Perfectly unreasonable any way you look at it," insisted Dick. "One note, either one, might have been sincere. Both could not be, and I had done nothing in the meantime to cause any change in your feelings."

"Yes, you had—you had read the first note."

"But you had written it to me, and had put it where you knew I should get it."

"No, I feared—that is, I was sure that you would not look there any more. You had not looked for a long time, you know. I hardly know why I did write it; I enjoyed our boy and girl make-believe, and when you went away I missed it; and, just as we pretend to care for people in books, I pretended to care very much for the one who had gone away and left me. It wasn't really you; it was just a vague sort of ideal who looked something like you."

"And then the second note was addressed to the real me, and represented your real state of mind?"

"Well, not exactly that, either. You see, I was pro-

voked that you had read something that was scarcely intended for you, and—”

“And you didn’t really want to see me again?”

“It seems perfectly plain to me. I did want to see you, but I did not want you to see the note—and yet if you were never coming back at all I should have wanted you to see the note; but it was entirely different when you took it for granted that I should have written that kind of note if I had known that you would read it. Don’t you see?”

“Oh, let it go,” said Dick. “I always was stupid; let’s begin again now— But what was Lorrain doing here?”

“If you were truly respectable, you would be heartily ashamed of yourself for speaking of him as you did. He is one of your friends, too.”

“He is a thoughtful friend of himself, but of no one else. Where on earth did you meet him?”

“You don’t have to pretend to be a boy; you are one,” said Kate. “But he is not a friend of mine, so you might have done worse. Father met him in connection with business, and he came out here to see father, and I met him incidentally. This was the very night after you left. He always speaks kindly of you—”

“Kindly—humph!” broke in Dick.

“Yes, he says that you are good-natured and warm-hearted and well-meaning; but that you are so impulsive that your uncle could no longer put up with it.”

“Cad!” said Dick explosively. “And this is your new friend?”

“It is just lots of fun to tease you; no wonder I

miss you. Still, to be perfectly frank, he is not my friend. He merely overtook me the night you saw us together, and I have not seen him since. Father does not like him either."

"I am glad you added that 'either.' Does your father's estimate of a young man outweigh your own?" Dick was wondering if he had not better let the National Steel Mills off with nothing worse than a good shaking.

"They have never clashed yet," answered Kate with circumspection. "But I must turn back now. Auntie and I are on the best of terms, and it is best to continue thus."

"How often may I come and see you?" asked Dick, after they had started to return.

"I suppose I had better consult with father."

This remark producing no reply, she added: "We couldn't possibly resume the boy and girl attitude, you know."

"I don't want to," said Dick decisively.

"Do you mean to come right to the door and call on me?" asked Kate stopping to look at him. They looked into each other's eyes and then broke into merry laughter.

"I am not the only child in this group," said Dick; "but honestly, I hate to flutter down to every-day, commonplace conventionality. I guess I must be part Gipsy."

"I'm afraid I'm a good deal that way myself," admitted Kate; "but surely the adventure of the bear den should have cured us both."

"Oh, but that was a complication, the like of which could never again occur. It was terrible while it lasted; but now that it is all over, won't you own up that it was more fun than any stately affair you have ever participated in?"

"It really is funny to look back to; but I wouldn't go through with it again for worlds."

They were very close to the gate now. The moon was just visible, and they paused once more and looked into each other's eyes, dim and soft and misty in the thin light.

"But it never could happen again," said Dick assuringly.

"But something else might."

"Nonsense," scoffed Dick.

"Kate, is that you?" asked a low, firm voice.

They stood in startled surprise, and so lightly does civilization rest on us that their first impulse was to run; but Dick, being more the practised outlaw, was the first to recover.

"Answer," he whispered, nudging her.

"Yes, Auntie," she answered, in a voice so composed that it was unnaturally formal.

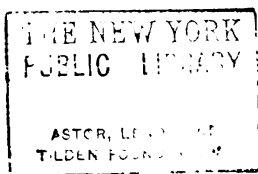
"Who is that with you?"

Again there was silence. Dick belonged to that cheerful band of free-booters who bluff persistently and hopefully, until they get caught at it; and then cut everything behind them and stake all on making their bluff a reality. As it is a resourceful crew, it requires ready tact if it is to be properly controlled.

"Tell her," he whispered commandingly.



Their first impulse was to run



"It is Mr. Bannington," replied Kate with sinking heart and voice.

"What?" exclaimed Miss Burton, trying to see him in the gloom, for the moon being young had been forced to retire early.

The reaction had set in with rollicking force. Dick walked up to the gate, turned on his flash and held it with the bright disk shining on his face. "Don't you remember me?" he effused pleasantly, as though sight of his face were sure to recall happy experiences.

Miss Burton was astonished; the face which stood out so clearly before her was that of the inspector of Bannington Park to whom she had once given a tip. It was a frank, boyish face, and the eyes were dancing merrily. There was something about the face, glowing with the eternal youth of to-day, and yesterday, and long, long ago, which sent strange, warm rays through the crust of years which shielded her, lighting the inmost recess of her heart and showing the little trinkets of girlish sentiment, which, all unknown to herself, were still kept and guarded as the great treasures of her life.

The merry eyes, gentle and fearless, looked into hers with good-humored challenge, the smiling lips seemed ready to frame an answer in kind to any question she might ask, to controvert any statement she might make. So taken by surprise was she, and so curiously affected, that she found difficulty in recovering her self-possession, usually so reliable.

"Certainly," she answered with reserve, which she instinctively felt he would regard as affectation; and

then she turned to the girl. "Katherine"—her voice had the true ring now—"I think it time for you to come in."

"Does that include me?" asked Dick brazenly.

"It was not intended to," answered Miss Burton, enjoying the touch of her returned dignity.

"Then I wish to offer an amendment."

"You told me that you were the inspector of Bannington Park," said Miss Burton accusingly.

"This is always the way the world uses me. I tried to save you embarrassment, and you class it in as ordinary subterfuge. I am Dick Bannington, nephew of Richard, and an outcast on the face of the whole earth. Let me come in and we'll talk it all over and decide on what's to be done."

"I think it would be more agreeable to talk it over privately," said Miss Burton.

"More agreeable, certainly," acquiesced Dick with ponderous gravity; "but are we justified in permitting agreeableness to be the determining point in the selection of our duties? No, no indeed."

Miss Burton was really very perturbed at Kate's peculiar conduct, and, as the poise which requires years to produce is not to be overturned utterly by the sight of a boy's face smiling out at one from a circle of white light, she again felt an unlimited capacity for the giving of final decisions from which there was expected to be no appeal.

Although it was too dark to have been detected, she did not even smile. It was a firm conviction with her that levity out of place was entitled to absolutely no

consideration. "I think, Mr. Bannington, that the proper course would be for you to withdraw for the present," she said rather distantly. "If the acquaintance is to be resumed it must be on a more formal basis."

"Yes, but I don't like that way," said Dick with sincere seriousness this time. Now it was perfectly dark, and a faint smile was allowed to curl Miss Burton's lips at this speech: it was so boyishly boyish. "Katherine—as you are also Miss Burton, this is the simplest way to distinguish you—"

"You could say Miss Katherine, and even the use of Miss Burton would not be likely to lead to complications," suggested Miss Burton with genteel satire.

"That's so, too," admitted Dick. "Well, Miss Katherine knows plenty of reasons why our informal acquaintance just at this time was more agreeable than a strictly conventional acquaintance would have been. I am just starting into business for myself and in a sense it is competition with her father and my uncle who do not evince that genial cordiality which is a distinctive by-product of the true neighborly spirit. So you see how it is yourself."

Dick had talked himself into feeling perfectly at home with Miss Burton, and saw no reason why she should not have made similar advancement; but she did not lightly change her attitude toward a subject, and said without a flaw in her reserve: "Of course, if you feel that an open acquaintance might lead to embarrassment, the only thing to do is to postpone the establishment of any acquaintance until this condition

no longer exists. I must request that you will be good enough to avoid meeting Miss Burton until you are willing to call at her home in accordance with the rules of propriety."

"Well, that suits me, all right," responded Dick. "May I call to-morrow night?"

"I think that at least a week should elapse before you call again, and in the meantime, you had better consider carefully whether or not the call would be pleasant for any of us. Good evening."

"Good evening," said Dick, taking off his hat, and wishing that it were Miss Burton's head. Kate and her aunt walked up the path to the house, and Dick walked very slowly along the back road toward Minister.

"She's as generous as a spider!" he exclaimed after having walked a short distance. "She impresses me as having been preserved in alcohol since the Middle Ages, so that even a hasty comparison will convince the skeptical that the world is surely getting better. She evidently imagines that it is as necessary to guard and protect an American girl of to-day, as it was to hover about one of those animated dolls of the Romantic Age. I wish auntie had taken her vacation, beginning this afternoon. I can see where she is going to be a disturbing element."

It was a fine, brisk night; all the world seemed filled with motion and little waves of energy kept entering Dick's body until it was impossible for him to be down-cast. He stepped out with a full, easy stride and his next remark clearly indicated that an earthly existence

was again beginning to find favor in his sight. "I wish old Mulligan was along," he said.

As the first street lamp in Minster, by this time a familiar friend, rounded the curve, Dick paused, looked up at the stars and back at the misty road. "Where every prospect pleases, and only aunts are vile," he said fervently, and pleased with his state of mind, he whistled an inspiring march until the approach of other wayfarers suggested the propriety of drawing the modern veil across his joyous exuberance.

Dick was now following the markets, keeping close watch over the affairs at Washington, and getting himself thoroughly into the spirit of genuine commercialism. A week seemed beyond his patience, and he found it impossible to keep his mind from speculating on the outcome of Miss Burton's unsolicited administration of his affairs. It was not hard for him to convince himself that he had made a good impression on Mr. Burton, but he greatly preferred to be under no obligations to that gentleman, and felt much aggrieved that he could not continue his love-making according to the established custom of the offspring of warring factions.

At the expiration of four days, he decided to strain his forbearance no longer, and about nine o'clock in the evening he started for the oak tree post-office. He found a note and gleefully hurried up the road to read it. By the aid of his electric torch, he read: "He who fights and runs away, may live to run another day; while he who stays may lose the fight and have his sorrows double, for might is right and aunts are bright and life is full of trouble."

"I wish she would write simple sense," he exclaimed impatiently. "I suppose I ought to see exactly what she means, but I don't. The way it looks to me is, that she has tried to put over a clever tale which was not plausible enough for auntie to swallow, auntie came down with the heel of oppression, and henceforth Richard is not considered essential to Katherine's happiness. Well, peace to his ashes, I don't intend to give up as long as I'm conscious.

"I haven't time to make a rhyme, for rhyming's not my way; but have no care, I'll sure be there, when auntie gets too gay," he wrote beneath her lines and remarked: "I call that rather neat, and this will let her know that I am going to call a week to the minute from the date that auntie herself set."

Slipping the note into the tree he walked back to Minster, satisfied that his affairs were progressing nicely. He knew it was going to be a strain on his will power to keep his attention under control until the remainder of the week had expired; but he had an entirely new set of formulas, prepared especially for Mr. Burton's benefit, and decided to spend most of his time in practising Ivan on them.

This useful labor kept him employed until the night of his call arrived. After deliberation, he decided to wear a dinner coat, and his spirits rose prodigiously as he dressed. Dressing always had a peculiar stimulation for him; he recited fragments of poetry, he sang fragments of song, and during the intervals he carried on a conversation with Mulligan, one-sided, to be sure,

but learned and versatile, without being in any sense a mental strain.

During the entire period consumed in dressing—and the period was a long one, not from any difficulty in adjusting his raiment, but because he found it necessary to gesture fluently—well, during all this time, Mulligan's mingled features were wreathed in a hideously happy smile, and his twisted tail vibrated in joyous unison with the waves of happiness which emanated from his master.

Without the dog, all the sunny sweetness of Dick's nature would have been confined until fermentation set in, but as it was, it was gathered at the floodtide of ripening, and he ran no risk of becoming a cynic at heart. He longed for the dawning of the new social order, he thirsted for the moment when, stripped to the waist, he should enter the ring to do battle with the steel industry, but in spite of all this he was still impulsive Dick Bannington, and it was lucky for him that just at this time he had Mulligan as a safety-valve.

When all was finished, when the last little shruggings to make his coat set gracefully had been given, and the tie had received its final pat; when he had shaken hands with himself before the mirror in congratulation that what he called his "boundaries" were still clear-cut and unbroken, then his face sobered for the inevitable wrench.

"Mulligan," he said, seating himself and taking the dog's head between his hands, "you know you can't go, and there's no use turning that martyred, pleading

light into those good brown eyes of yours. If you were not sorry at all, I'd drop you out the window as an ingrate, but you don't have to look heartbroken when you know I am coming back sometime to-night and that I'll take you for a walk. I wish you weren't such an aristocrat. I wish you would look on Ivan and Emil as equals and treat them as comrades, so that they could take you for a jaunt now and again, but just as you are, old chap, you are you; and when every paper in the country has a cartoon of your old pal standing on the prostrate form of the steel monster, I'll buy you the best porterhouse steak in this village, and then we'll go into the woods on a little vacation of our own. Good night, old scout."

CHAPTER XXVI

A RIDE IN THE MOONLIGHT

DICK ran up the steps of the Burton mansion with that pleasant feeling of solidarity which an active circulation brings. Every little nerve was sending in messages to say that all was well in its neighborhood, and not to feel any hesitation about calling out the reserve. This feeling was especially noticeable in his eyes and was an infallible indication that he was roundly fit.

Dick was only dimly conscious of this, he was busy examining different openings to make his future welcome a certainty, but it cheered him to know that all his enemies were on the outside. He was ready to meet whatever fate had in store, and so he rang the bell with vigor and assurance.

After having been shown into the drawing-room he first examined his surroundings and was pleased to find them tasty and restful. But it was not in the nature of furnishings to occupy his attention long, and he fell to wondering how many of the family he was to meet and what their order of arrival would be.

He had not long to wonder, however, for Miss Burton presently entered. She was dressed in dove gray, and looked very correct, formidably correct. She held her head at an angle which seemed to whisper

warningly: "This is the final authority upon all mundane subjects."

Dick was impressed, but not overawed. He had an active intuition which was so often correct that he placed great reliance upon its judgment, and as Miss Burton entered, he rose and hastened to meet her, keeping his eyes on hers. She gave him her hand coldly but correctly and asked him to be seated. They took seats some distance apart, and Dick continued to give free play to his intuition. He was sure that she was disposed to like him, and that the part which most appealed to her was his jaunty rebellion against the conventional.

Nothing but intuition could have brought such a perfectly bizarre idea to a sane mind; for as has already been stated, Miss Burton was this evening correct, to even a finer degree than her usual high standard. She looked at Dick with that delicate indignation which indicated that she was surprised at an intruder displaying such ease of manner—and Dick looked at her in frank and smiling approval.

"You should wear that shade all the time," he advised, "it is wonderfully becoming."

She had expected he would immediately ask for Kate and was prepared to smother with unwavering promptness any intentions he might hold regarding her ward.

"Thank you," she replied, smoothing her sleeve, "I nearly always wear gray."

"Can you hear colors?" asked Dick.

"Hear colors?" she repeated with a little flush of

interest, which was immediately snuffed. "No, I can not hear colors."

"Well, I can. Now, the sound of your dress is like birds at dawn, not one bird but all of them, not singing, you know, but twittering and cheeping and murmuring together, the way birds do when the sun is beginning to send the little breezes ahead to fan the haze away. Are you fond of the outdoors?"

Miss Burton's astonishment grew; this young man was not merely being polite to her, he paid all his attention to her without glancing at the door or listening for a footstep, and he was not talking to avoid an embarrassing silence or a possibly disappointing subject. He was talking of things which interested himself and he had a companionable way of inviting her to inspect the shells and bright pebbles which he had picked up along the great shore of life.

"I am not quite so fond of it as I used to be. When I was young, I was almost passionately fond of it."

"If you choose to look on yourself as old, I shall not disagree with you, but I think it's foolish to grow old. It shows such a narrow, selfish avoidance of humanity as a race."

"I don't think I understand you."

"Well, if you—no, I'll say if one, spends part of each day in examining one's material body, one is sure to note changes in it and get filled with this age heresy, but if one keeps looking out for new inventions, new lines of thought, and especially new social growth, one sees that the race itself is just emerging from childhood, loses oneself in the great future of the race, for-

gets one's own body entirely, until first thing one knows one has to spank one's own grandchildren for thinking one isn't as up to date as they are."

"I presume there is a grain of truth in your philosophy," admitted Miss Burton, smiling at Dick's closing phrase delivered in the tone of serious argument.

"You try it as a prescription and see if there isn't more than a grain of truth in it. Are you interested in evolution?"

"Well, not deeply interested."

"You're the loser; it's great fun. Most people object even to being closely related to the anthropoid apes, but when you trace their family tree back through the amphibians to the genuine fish, and next, to an individual with nothing but a skin and a stomach, winding up with a single cell as the original ancestor, they make a noise like an emergency call."

"I must say that I am thankful that I do not have to accept such a doctrine."

"Did you ever stop to think that if it were necessary to indorse the natural laws before they would act, we shouldn't be here at all? We affirm and deny and go to war over mysteries, but it doesn't make any difference—except to our immediate relatives. The natural forces work right along and if we don't learn anything else during our entire term except that we are nothing but innocent bystanders after all, we've learned a lot."

"That rather does away with incentive, does it not?"

"I have a friend who is a Russian. He has a great prejudice against orthodox religion, but his whole

life is a religious service. He is a mystic, and has to fight against religion constantly. He has got the fallen angels mixed up in his evolution and it's rather an interesting complication. He says that when the angels rebelled, they were hurled out of Heaven with only one faculty and the germ of eternal life. This one faculty was a dim, misty memory of perfection. Get it clearly now, just a germ of eternal life and a vague idea of perfection to go with it. In order to make the contrast complete, they were hurled to the very depths of the inky ocean, where never a single ray of light can penetrate; and there in the slime they gathered together enough matter to make single cells apiece and this gave the germ of life a means of expression, but there was no way to express this idea of perfection, and it is the irrepressible impulse to express ourselves which is life's greatest dynamic.

"With this powerful yearning they continued to grope about in the sea, moaning with the anguish of their inability to express themselves. No, it was worse than this, for a single cell has nothing to make a moan with. It was as though all was paralyzed except the single brain cell which held the conception of one's strongest desire. They did not even have self-consciousness. Well, they tossed about in the water until some of them gathered into clusters. This was a start, and from that on they clustered together until different cells began to perform special functions. But when this was done the newly formed organism had as its true individuality, its control, the stricken soul of a banished angel, while each of the component cells had

nothing but a galvanic contact, through a nerve, with the true ego.

"You see, the first lesson learned was interdependence, mutual assistance, and all the succeeding lessons have been along this line. Up the angels struggled, along the stony path of self-development, until, with the evolving of man, they have a very decent machine to work with. When they help one another, they progress rapidly; when they fight and compete, they sink back. Sooner or later experience will teach them—but the enlarging on this phase of it would take a week, and perhaps it would weary you."

"I should not care for it all in one lesson," replied Miss Burton, who had forgotten her mission, "but really it is very interesting, and I had always supposed evolution to be disgusting."

"This is not evolution; it is merely advanced transmigration, the fitting of a mystery to a science by a man who was cast in the religious mold. Evolution works just the other way. There was no soul to begin with and the development of functions has at the same time produced the mind and soul."

"Oh, the soul must have come as a gift from above, not as an outgrowth of mere matter! I like the fallen angel idea the better. There is something fascinatingly grand in the thought of this long struggle back toward their former position."

"I have done it!" cried Dick, slapping his fingers upon his palm.

"Done what?" asked Miss Burton, giving a nervous start.

"Made you forget your dignity and all that, and come right out and talk things over with me—even if I did have to start a long way from the subject I want to talk about."

She answered his smile. "What made you think that I would not be willing to come right out and talk things over with you?"

"You did. You came into this room this evening and looked down on me and said to yourself: 'Young man, it is my duty to prove to you, in as few words as possible, that you are not welcome—and I think I shall enjoy putting you back in your proper element as quickly and firmly as possible.' That is what you thought, but I wanted to take you out of yourself first, so that we'd have a fair start. Now I am ready for the verdict."

Miss Burton looked down at the floor. The shaded lamps threw a soft light over her, and it suddenly occurred to Dick that she was not at all bad looking. Miss Burton was one of those women who, having once yielded to their relatives in a matter of moment, devote the balance of their lives silently to holding up this compliance as the cause of all subsequent unhappiness, no matter how remote it may be. And for fear that the unhappiness would not be sufficiently conspicuous, develop an expression of martyr-like submission which serves as a perennial accusation against these unhappy and repentant relatives.

Even as the intoxicated man is seldom so far under the influence of drink that some part of his personality is not aware of his irrational acts, so Miss Burton fully

understood that her attitude was a species of torture to those about her. Yet having deliberately chosen this plan, consciousness of it only served to instruct her in bringing it to a higher state of perfection.

But so artificial a warping of human beauty could not endure the strong rays from Dick's normal personality, and when Miss Burton let her eyes fall to the floor, all the wasted years of her narrow life seemed to crowd about her to clamor at the starvation with which she had fed them. She could not understand her feelings; it was nothing he had said, it was not even himself as an individual. It was the spirit of youth which she had denied and which had returned when least expected to taunt and disarm her.

"Let's go out into the moonlight," suggested Dick after a minute's silence. "The night is beautiful, and no matter what you have to say, it will be easier to say it in the moonlight."

His voice had grown serious at the thought of all this message might mean to him, for the continued absence of Kate convinced him that the decision had not been in his favor.

"Katherine's father insisted on her accompanying him to New York to do some shopping, and plan some recreation for the evening," explained Miss Burton.

She did not know that she was going to say it, and afterward she did not know why she had said it, but when Dick said, "Thank you," very softly, she was surprised to see how glad she was that she had said it.

"Well, shall we go outdoors?" he asked again. "It is criminal to stay in the house such a night as this."

"Yes, I think it would be very enjoyable in the moonlight," replied Miss Burton a little wistfully. "I shall get a wrap at once."

"I am going bareheaded," announced the primitive Richard.

"Then I am going bareheaded too," said the sedate Miss Burton with a laugh which differed materially from any which had passed her lips for years.

She picked up a white knitted scarf as they passed through the hall and soon they were together in the shadows of the trees. It seemed like a dream to her; for so many years she had developed an affectation that it had become a reality to herself and all about her; and now the youth, her own youth, which she had imprisoned long ago, had returned, laughing coyly, thrilling with exhilaration at what was really an adventure, and wonderful with the reincarnation of that free girlish shyness which is a mixture of challenge, inexperience, and the secretiveness of the wild thing which watches the hunter from a thicket and half hopes for discovery and the glorious chase afterward with its own life as the prize.

And Dick was not playing a part either, at least not purposely playing one. Miss Burton was an original character possessing an individuality which interested him, and it always afforded him a wealth of amusement to rout old age and make old folk feel and act like children. He was so fond of companionship that he invariably made companions of those about him, age, sex, nor species being allowed to interfere.

A stretch of smooth sward, flecked with moonlight,

spread out before them. "I can beat you to that big oak tree," cried Dick pointing.

She looked into his face a moment, and then without a word, turned and ran with surprising lightness toward the tree. Dick followed, drew alongside and made the race a tie.

"Dear, dear," she said, catching her breath, "I haven't run that far for—it must be twenty years."

Her face was flushed, her eyes danced, and as Dick noted them with the critical eye of a connoisseur, it occurred to him that twenty years ago he would have been sorely tempted to claim a prize at the end of the race.

"You don't look much older than that yourself," was what he said. "I'll tell you what I'd like to do, I'd like to put a tick-tack on somebody's window. Are you game?"

"Not that game," replied Miss Burton laughing—it was so easy to laugh this evening. "I never could stand another run, and I am sure we'd be chased if you were the leader."

"Well, come along, then, and we'll see if there is any mischief to get into on these grounds; and as we walk, I'll tell you something funny. For several days I thought my uncle wanted me to marry you—and I was already head over heels in love with your niece."

"Marry me?" exclaimed Miss Burton, almost recovering her dignity.

"Yes, you see it was this way—" and Dick swung into a full account of all that had taken place since his return.

"It certainly is lots of fun to be young," she said with a sigh when at last he had finished.

"Yes, and the best of it is that it is the privilege of all free people," added Dick. "Only the slaves of the years get old. Now, for instance, here is a swing," he said, pointing to one which had been erected to entertain the Sunday-school class which a friend of Kate's taught, and which had been allowed to remain. "Old folk would pass this swing grunting and grumbling, but we shall get in and take a ride."

"Oh, no, there is a limit to my folly," protested Miss Burton; but all the time she was being led toward the swing and soon she was seated in it, and Dick was pushing vigorously until the ropes creaked and Miss Burton, with little gasps and gurgles, found herself soaring up to the branches.

"Twenty," he counted, "and that's one for each birthday, and you'll have to do your own pumping if you want to ride any more."

The swing was permitted to wear out its own momentum, and when it at last hung at rest again, Dick's hilarity had left him and he asked soberly: "Are you my for-truly friend?"

"I am," replied Miss Burton, holding up her right hand with affected solemnity. "I have to be, for if you should tell all that I have done to-night, I should be ashamed to meet people I know."

"Well, then, tell me the result of the conference."

"The result of the conference was that you had better give up Katherine's acquaintance."

"Was it unanimous?"

"I believe there was a dissenting opinion, but that was the final verdict."

"Who conferred?"

"You ask entirely too many questions. Only Katherine and myself conferred."

"Who gave the dissenting opinion?"

Miss Burton laughed, her laugh had become very musical. "The one who knew you best," she said.

"Has anything happened since to modify the verdict?"

Again she laughed. "Yes, the elder conferee has toppled from her pedestal and has found out that she is much like other men."

"Then I move you that the former verdict be set aside and a new conferee be elected—me being it."

"Well, what do you propose?"

"I advise that the acquaintance, instead of being discontinued, be cultivated."

"Now, I shall be perfectly frank with you," said Miss Burton. "I am going to call you Dick."

"It has been tried before without fatal results."

"Well, Dick, Kate convinced me that under the circumstances, it would not be altogether fair to confide in Mr. Burton."

"She has a wonderful lot of wisdom for a girl!" exclaimed Dick enthusiastically. "Now, I'll tell you why. You see I am only an experiment, I'm starting a new business which is liable to interfere with Mr. Burton's business. I have every reason to believe that he is already prejudiced against the name of Bannington, and it would be a square deal all around if Kate

and I were left to figure it out ourselves, free from any outside interference."

"A father's natural supervision can scarcely be called outside interference," said Miss Burton with a friendly smile.

"Well, in this case, a hang-over prejudice makes it even worse."

"I honestly don't know what my duty is, now," said Miss Burton.

"Why can't we meet with you for a chaperone? Then there would only be one danger, and we'll have to risk that."

"What danger?" asked Miss Burton innocently.

"Kate is sure to become jealous."

Any one would have joined in Miss Burton's laughter. It was as silvery as the moonlight, and this in spite of the fact that her little circle had supposed that she had long ago forgotten how to laugh at all. This world is nothing but a huge laboratory; mix the right chemicals together and the result is sure to be beautiful and orderly, and Dick's personality was the complement which Miss Burton had been lacking.

"If we try the experiment, I shall be very vigilant and circumspect," she said warningly.

"Well, then, that is settled," said Dick. "Now, about how many times a week do you think I should call?"

"Once, just once."

"Oh, tyranny! Twice, anyway."

"You may come the fourth night from this, as you have not seen her this time; and now I must go in for

my good name's sake. I am almost afraid to face the butler as it is."

"Shall I call at the front or the back door?" asked Dick.

"Such a question!" exclaimed Miss Burton, as they walked toward the house.

"Well?" asked Dick after a long silence.

"If I were you, I should call first at the oak tree post-office," said Miss Burton.

After Dick had slipped on his coat and was standing hat in hand, he looked gravely into Miss Burton's eyes. "I have enjoyed my first real call immensely. I shall always be indebted to you, but I must say that you have been a terrible hypocrite. If you do not know what I mean, just look in your mirror before your present mood leaves you and see how different you really are from the way you have tried to appear."

He held her hand in a long, firm clasp at parting; and Miss Burton did look in her mirror that night, and furthermore had a long refreshing cry before she went to sleep which was quite necessary for proper readjustment. The tears were not of sorrow, and still there was also a tinge of sadness in them; not at having been found out, but in having been able to keep the real self of her hidden so long.

CHAPTER XXVII

ENTERING THE STRETCH

HALF-PAST seven on the morning of the fifteenth of October found Emil and Ivan transforming the outer office at ninety-six Nathan Street from a sleeping-breakfast-room into a neat and orderly commercial bastion. The breakfast dishes had been washed and Emil was putting them carefully into the filing cabinet while Ivan folded the bedding and arranged it on the bunks back of the counter.

"This is but little like I expected," said Ivan, pausing for a moment. "Here have I become a janitor, a cook, a general office man, and a chamber maid—and I came to this country to fight for liberty."

"You are fighting for liberty," replied Emil, "but you are one of those who can never learn that the most successful fights are of the greatest silence. You have become a leader among the Russian Jews. If the present system continues long enough they will all the money in the world control. Who the money controls the world controls, but evolution is never enough for you. You must have things come about through an election or a battle before you are content. As I have many times pointed out to you—"

A knock on the door interrupted Emil and Ivan

opened it to find the iceman with a large chunk standing in the hall.

"Come but twice a week after this, and come earlier," said Ivan, taking the ice and putting it into the wall safe.

"You must be careful," cautioned Emil. "You are knocking the paint off that safe and getting it all with nicks covered."

"If my way of doing it does not satisfy you, you are at liberty to do it yourself."

"I am the head bookkeeper, it would be improper," replied Emil with dignity.

"You speak as though I were a janitor by inheritance," retorted Ivan. "To one who believes that all labor is equally honorable, how can any task be improper?"

"Unless one possess unusual powers of discrimination, it is extremely difficult to apply a grand and undeniable abstract truth. Under certain circumstances I would cheerfully the ice into the safe put, but to our present business such a course would be harmful."

Ivan had picked up the broom, but instead of using it, he faced Emil and demanded: "Did we come to this country to engage in business?"

"Not so," admitted Emil. "We came under false pretensions. This young Bannington pretended to be of great wealth possessed, and now—"

"He was of great wealth possessed, he does not pretend things. You know perfectly well how this has come about and you are of a mean spirit to reproach him. As for me, I shall do my best by him."

"You would do no more than I, myself, am ready to do. If you are so thoughtful of his interests, why are you not of the wall safe more careful. Does he wish it known that it is of wood—and an ice-box?"

"This is a small matter," replied Ivan disdainfully. "I am willing to give up my life for him."

"That is also a small matter," rejoined Emil. "You were willing to give up your life for Russia, for suffering humanity, for—well for almost any reason whatever, but after all, the giving up of a life is of small effect. I should rather have to help me one living man than a dozen dead ones. It is easy enough to say, my life I am willing at his feet to lay down, but when it comes to being careful of the ice-box day after day, it becomes monotonous, and—"

"There is nothing on earth so monotonous as the constant growling of your voice," cried Ivan. "One would think that a man's capacity in all things was to be measured by the care he took of ice-boxes. You do nothing all day but read in a book and complain bitterly at your lot. I study to see how I can best help Dick out of his trouble. I tell you he is in deep trouble. He tries to pass it off, but I can see into him. Last night when he spoke at the meeting, did you notice him? He was not bitter against the rich; he said that it was impossible to judge by a man's clothes or position or surroundings how heavy was the load he was carrying, and that if socialism would relieve only the poor of their sufferings it would be a failure. He laid the most stress on the terrific struggles of the business men of to-day and how gladly they would lay

down their responsibilities if they could. He is in great need of money."

"That is true," admitted Emil thoughtfully. "We have not had meat for four days—except the Mulligan, of course."

"Beans and rice are more nourishing than meat, but dogs must have some meat," said Ivan loyally.

"If I could see what he is trying to do, I could stand it better," said Emil, "but what sense is there in his hiring those two crippled old men and making one of them stay up all night to work?"

"I know not, but I am sure the reason is sufficient. Hush, here he comes."

Dick opened the door with a vigorous swing and entered with Mulligan. "This October air is like wine," he exclaimed heartily. "Great stuff for the lungs—good for the stomach, too. I think I can almost digest those flap-jacks now, Ivan, but they are dangerous things for an amateur to fool with. You mean well, I know, but your early Russian training is against you. I fear you use the same recipe for flap-jacks that you formerly used for bombs."

"A man can do but his best. Cooking is not my gift. I came to this country willing to lay down my—"

"That's all right, Ivan. Some are born cooks, some achieve cookery, and some have to exist on your concoctions; but when it comes to the laying down of a life or a carpet, that is an entirely different matter. Well, I must get to work."

Before Dick reached the door of his private office,

Emil stopped him. "I should like to have some work to do. Here we have been for three months and not more than a dozen customers."

"What difference does that make?" demanded Dick. "We did not get any money from the few we did have, so why wish to be bothered with more?"

"Yes," said Ivan earnestly, "but it seems a shame to maintain expensive offices and not do any business. It is a waste of both time and money."

"Nonsense," scoffed Dick. "When it comes to money, none of us has any to waste, but when it comes to time there is always a surplus anyway. Why, if you are short of time, just go steal a diamond ring and they'll probably give you ten years for it."

"Still, I should like some work that would keep me busy," grumbled Emil.

"I sincerely sympathize with you," said Dick. "You have an abundance of paper; why don't you write the libretto of an up-to-date history. Now, listen; things have to come to a head pretty soon, and I want both of you to keep busy if any customers come. Don't notice them at first. Be proud, be haughty, that is the way to give the impression of great prosperity. I have written to a lot of people who owe me money. If any one tries to pay you money, don't be in a hurry to take it; make them identify themselves and if you do take it, be surly about it—we don't want any one to think that we are green to the ways of business—but don't let them get away entirely. Use the delay formula on all who ring up, and if any one is admitted

to my office, use the butt-in formula. Come, Mulligan."

Dick entered his private office and proceeded to hunt for a cigarette. Failing to find it he opened the door and asked: "Ivan, when you pawned my Tuxedo, did you search the pockets?"

"I don't think I did," answered Ivan.

"Make it a rule never to pawn anything or give anything away without first examining the pockets," said Dick sternly.

He reentered his office and taking a perfecto from a drawer in his desk, he smelled of it lovingly, then dampened a blotter and put them both back into the drawer.

In the meantime, Emil had taken down the huge ledger, turned its blank pages and replaced it with a sigh, after which he knocked on Dick's door and was admitted. "Have you nothing you wish to know?" he asked soberly.

"No, I am perfectly familiar with everything I have," answered Dick with equal seriousness.

"I mean, is there nothing which you lack which you wish?"

"Oh, many things, dear friend, many things; but from what I know of you, I question your ability to supply the demand."

"I should very much like some work," persisted Emil sadly.

"Have you committed to memory the names of the New York capitalists and the estimated size of their fortunes?"

"Yes, indeed. Shall I name them alphabetically, or according to the size of their fortunes?"

"If you do either in my presence, I shall take your life with great violence." Dick studied a moment and then asked: "When was the dawn of civilization?"

"According to the Bible, six thousand years ago, because Adam was a civilized being to begin with; but if you really mean the dawn of civilization, it would be safe to put it back at least thirty thousand years. Morgan says—"

"That's close enough. Now, I want to know the value of one penny at six per cent. compound interest from the dawn of Morgan's civilization. You need not carry the answers out farther than mills. Try to get this as soon as possible."

"Ah, that is something like a job!" exclaimed Emil, rubbing his hands together delightedly as he returned to the outer office. "Ah, Ivan, I now have a job which is to my ability fitted."

"I care not," answered Ivan. "I have a new cook-book and I am going to learn how to construct a suet pudding."

Dick slowly filled and lighted a pipe. "Mulligan, this has to explode pretty soon, there is no use talking. They are trying to bluff me and they certainly deserve credit, but, hang it, Mulligan, they have to give in. Sooner or later, they have to give in. I always did like a pipe better than a cigar, but I wish I were as strong financially as this pipe is odoriferously."

He clasped his hands behind his head and leaned back in his chair, mechanically placing his feet on the

desk. His brows were drawn together and the lines of long-continued strain were faintly visible. The three past months had thumbed his face heavily, hardening it and molding it to a cast of grim determination. The old boyishness was still there, but it no longer waited to spring forth, instead it appeared to come as an instructed delegate. After a time he took a photograph of Kate from a drawer and shading his eyes with the palm of his left hand he gazed at it steadily.

The honk of a motor was heard in the street below, and presently William Burton, very busy and very important, entered the outer office. Emil continued his figuring and Ivan, whose book was hidden, appeared to be filling out checks to pay a heap of bills which lay on the desk before him.

Mr. Burton stamped his foot. "Well, when am I to be waited on?"

"Whom do you wish to see?" inquired Ivan softly.

"I want to see that young Bannington."

"Have you an engagement with him?"

"Engagement? No! I am William Burton of the National Steel Mills, and I don't have to have engagements."

"He is very busy this morning and I doubt if he will see you, but I'll take in your card," said Ivan gently as he descended from his stool and opened the wicket door which separated them.

"I don't carry a card," snapped Burton. "My face is enough."

Ivan appeared as free from guile as a cold lizard.

"I am sorry, sir, but I can't take in your face and we have strict orders—"

"You simply say that I am here," roared Burton, turning purple.

Ivan tiptoed to the door and knocked softly. After waiting a moment he knocked a trifle more loudly. At his third attempt he was admitted and announced Mr. Burton without evincing the slightest excitement.

Dick rattled some papers in his hand for a moment and said with polite impatience: "Present Mr. Burton with my compliments and say that press of business compels me to ask him to call again."

Ivan closed the door reverently and said to Mr. Burton with formal independence: "Mr. Bannington's compliments, sir, and he says that press of business compels him to ask you to call again."

Mr. Burton's face worked convulsively and his rapid breathing was clearly audible. Many years had passed since he had been thrown against the granite of a modern business wall, and it was a shock which effectually loosened his habitual complacency. After one has been accustomed to talking freely with the brain of an industry, it is galling in the extreme to be stopped by the mere hands. One can not argue with a hand, one can not remonstrate with it, or revile it, or threaten it, or even stamp one's feet and swear before it—without losing one's dignity, and the strain is something terrific, when one is not properly braced.

It would have been as nothing to one of the common people, who never under any consideration come into contact with the brain of an enterprise, but who trans-

act all their affairs with mere hands, strong, unsympathetic, and having nothing whatever to do in deciding on the actions which they perform. This is really one of the most humiliating features of modern life, this constant dealing with the unseen and the immovable. All our traffic has some of the secretiveness of the "blind tiger." We rap on a door, a small wicket in it opens and a hand reaches forth, we put some money in the hand, and presently a package is given to us. We open the package and curse bitterly because we have been indecently done, but what is the fun in complaining to a bare wall? One can not even insult a bare wall.

And the wall between the brain of a corporation and the common people is just as real as though it were made of bronze. If you don't need credit, it is very soothing to ask it of the credit man, but if you are actually undergoing a severe financial depression, you will get more sympathy and nourishment from a frozen pump. The common people have been dealing with automatic fixtures so long that they also have lost their own identity. "The Common People" as a term, no longer suggests the bone and sinew of the nation. It suggests a two-legged insect with large glasses and a worried look, and this appears to be the ideal up to which most of us are striving to live.

But Mr. Burton did not feel like an invertebrate; he felt like the National Steel Mills, and to be calmly held from his purpose by so frail a barrier as a tall, foreign mystic, was to have his circulation increased to the danger point and fill him with an anarchy

which was something more than theoretical. He wanted to lay hands on something, but it was not there. He had no quarrel with the creature before him and the more expression he gave to his inner feelings, the more he would lower himself.

He coughed, he gurgled, and then he whirled on his heel and left the office, leaving the door standing wide, lest in his haste he smash it to pieces.

Ivan closed the door with deliberation and shook his head sorrowfully. "That one has plenty of money," he said. "He does not even get in. The next one will probably be after money, and he will receive a royal welcome. I wish I knew what our business really was."

The door opened and Lorrimer entered. "Is Mr. Bannington in?" he asked deferentially.

"I shall see," answered Ivan distantly, as he noted the worried look on Lorrimer's face and instantly suspected that a financial stringency lay behind it. "Give me your card, please."

Dick glanced at the card, placed the photograph back in the drawer, took out the perfecto, lighted it, ran his fingers through his hair, fixed his attention on a complicated blue-print, and said: "Admit him at once, Ivan."

After Lorrimer had entered and closed the door after him, Dick glanced up, nodded, and said: "Ah, Mr. Lorrimer, my uncle's secretary, I believe."

"I am his secretary no longer. I was discharged this morning."

"Is that so? Well?"

"You are probably aware that we lost the bid by ten thousand dollars. This also meant losing the other government bids and an incalculable amount of industrial business. It was a terrible blow to the plant and your uncle became suspicious at the small amount of difference between the bids. I had ten thousand dollars saved, and yesterday when B. S. P. got down to fifty, I bought. I told him of it at once, he immediately inferred that this money was the amount of my bribe, and this morning he discharged me."

"Did you say the stock was down to fifty?"

"Forty-eight, this morning, but it is worth as much as ever if it can just hold out a few months longer."

"How do you make that out?"

"Times are already beginning to improve, steel construction is still on the increase, and the future demand will be beyond the physical capacity of the present mills, but you understand that the war between the National and our people is to the death.

"You see, when Burton watered a few years ago, he put large blocks of stock among the big users of steel and they naturally feel an interest in using his output when the prices are the same. On the other hand, there has never been a large amount of Bannington stock on the market. Your uncle has some old-fashioned notions, and while he has branched out extensively, he has kept the plant itself pretty clean. He dropped a lot of money in the International Ship Syndicate a few years ago and the present panic has kept him down, but as I say, if he will just hold out until the reaction, he will win."

"How did you have the nerve to buy stock under the present conditions?"

"Well—your uncle is a peculiar man; he often consulted with me and sometimes took my advice. He was to make me a director as soon as I had sufficient stock. Of course he, himself, directs his directors, but still I felt that I could bring stronger pressure to bear. I have listed the contracts only awaiting the upward trend, I have a plan for reinstating our credit, and I—"

"Well, you certainly did take an interest in your work. Why did you come to see me?"

"To ask for employment. You have known of me for several years, and that I was perfectly trusted. You also know your uncle's eccentricities, and I felt sure that you would either give me employment or assist me in getting it. You perceive that my position is extremely embarrassing, as I could not make a complete explanation to any one but yourself."

"Well, I need just such a man as you," said Dick. "What was your salary?"

"I was getting three thousand, but of course I should be willing to start in for half that if—"

"I can pay as high wages as any one," interrupted Dick with dignity, "but you must understand from the very start that I run my own business in my own way. If you can not control your tongue, you are of absolutely no use to me. Things go on in this office every day which I should not care to have discussed outside. I may as well tell you in confidence that this is really a test office. I am finding out my men and if they

prove up, I place them in charge of special departments. I hire men on a plan of my own also, furnishing them with board and lodging and paying their salary out of the annual dividends."

"Board and lodging? Why this is most irregular."

"My entire system is irregular," said Dick sternly. "This method removes all temptation to gamble and brings in the income in a lump sum ready for investment. Another thing which I forgot to mention is, that I am never thankful for volunteer advice or comment. Think right along, keep in constant practice and be ready to hand out an opinion at a moment's notice, but don't throw them at me. Never enter this office without permission, and don't be too polite to customers—we have more now than we can attend to. I shall make you my auditor. There is nothing pressing in your department at present and I wish that you would write out in shorthand your full and complete views on the present financial situation, especially with regard to its bearing on the steel industry."

Dick paused and touched his bell. "Ivan," he said as soon as the general office man had entered, "Mr. Lorrimer is our new auditor. Provide him with desk room, stationery, and bedding."

Dick whirled his chair, picked up the blue-print, and Lorrimer followed Ivan into the outer office as one in a daze. He was comparing Dick's eccentricities with his uncle's and wondering what those of the next generation would be.

As soon as the door closed, Dick smothered the perfect and replaced it in the drawer with evident regret.

CHAPTER XXVIII

FORGING AHEAD

IVAN provided the new auditor with paper and Lorimer immediately started to cover it with hieroglyphics. The subject interested him and he determined to make a report which would leave nothing to be desired. Emil made very small figures and as he followed the prosperous career of his fictitious penny, his face was shrouded in concentration. He was not aware that any addition had been made to the office force. He was not even aware that any addition was necessary.

Ivan, however, was worried. It seemed to him that genuine money had been thrown away when Mr. Burton had been allowed to escape, and now that a new recruit had been added to a company whose chief task was finding something to do, he found it impossible to resist questioning Dick's wisdom. Suddenly the telephone rang, and he flew to the booth. It was Mr. Burton, and so eager was Ivan that he forgot formulas and hurried to the door to the private office, upon which he knocked vigorously.

Given permission to enter, he rushed in, and exclaimed: "Mr. Burton has rung, sir."

Dick looked at him in cold displeasure. "That is a matter of small importance," he said severely; "but it

is of very grave importance to disobey instructions. Why did you not use the tantalizing formula?"

"He wanted to see you very bad this morning, sir, and I thought—"

"Thinking is not one of your duties while in my employ. I told you always to use the tantalizing formula whenever a customer became anxious. Let me do all the worrying, and things will turn out all right. Now go back and hang up the receiver. When he calls again work through the tantalizing formula and then put me on the wire, and next time don't bother me for special instructions."

Twenty minutes later Dick was put on the wire after listening to a conversation between Ivan and Mr. Burton which was very gratifying. As he talked his voice was suave and sincere, but as he listened a grin of wicked delight stole over his features.

"Yes, this is Mr. Bannington—I am very sorry, but I told my clerk to inform you that I was very busy—My dear man, I can not drop one client to take up another—It is impossible for me to give you an appointment for to-day—Well, you are welcome to come and take your chances, and you may not have to wait long; but my business is such that it is impossible for me to favor one at the expense of another."

"Now it did him no good to hang up his receiver with a bang. Come here, Mulligan. Mulligan, this business is growing at a fearful rate. We have no vice-president, and I am going to make you it. You will make a dandy! Of course you are now entitled to a private secretary; but for the present we will let that

go, and you do not even have to occupy the private office of the V. P. That will do now, I am extremely busy and you go under that table where I can't see you, and have a good sleep. Blessed thing that a dog doesn't wear out his appetite for sleep."

As Mulligan retired to his favorite resting-place, the door of the outer office opened and Kate Burton entered in a hesitating manner. Her face was both pale and flushed, and her eyes unusually bright. It was evident that she was enjoying the luxury of an adventure not quite wicked and not quite proper. She closed the door softly and looked at the three men behind their wire screen. Emil continued to make figures, Lorrimer continued to make hooks and dashes, and Ivan continued to lift dummy bills from a pile, scan them carefully, and enter them in a book. Kate was a little awed at this evidence of industrial strenuousness, and hesitated at disturbing it.

"I beg your pardon," she said finally; "but is this Dick's—I mean Mr. Bannington's office."

Ivan raised his solemn eyes and instantly recognized the girl who had forced him to flee through a private estate at midnight, wearing the garb of a female cook.

His glance accused her. "Have you an engagement?" he asked severely.

"Why it is not absolutely—Yes, certainly I have an engagement," answered Kate in confusion.

"Give me your card and I shall take it in to him," said Ivan coldly.

After a deal of fumbling Kate procured a card which she handed to Ivan. Ivan bore the card to the president

of the Dickie Nut-lock Company, in evident disapproval; but the moment Dick glanced at it, he sprang to his feet. "Ivan," he exclaimed in a suppressed voice, "is there no limit to your stupidity! Now, don't let any one bother us. Step right in, Miss Burton."

"Oh, Dick," cried Kate as soon as Ivan had removed his reproachful countenance, "I can never in the world be conventional again. It seems to me that I always meet you where I shouldn't."

"Is that so?" asked Dick in surprise. "Now it never struck me that way. It always seems to me that I never meet you half as often as I really should. The fact is—"

"Mercy, Dick, but this is a terrible place to have an office," interrupted Kate, going to the window and gazing out.

"Yea, verily," answered Dick flourishing his hand; "but what a super-dandy office it is when you once get inside."

"It is a most dreadful neighborhood."

"Makes the contrast all the sharper."

"I almost fainted on my way here. The odors, Dick, are perfectly shocking."

"Merely prejudice," said Dick, taking down a battered volume which he had picked up in a second-hand store. "Listen to words of wisdom. 'It is an astonishing fact to many, but over-powering evidence seems to prove that rank odors are generally wholesome. This fact has been known by stockmen for years and in many large stables, male goats are kept to preserve the health of the horses and cattle—'"

"Dick! where did you ever get such a horrid book? Well, anyway, I hope it will never be necessary to preserve my health, by living in this neighborhood."

"How in the world did you get here?" asked Dick with interest.

"I walked; I did, indeed. I started in my car; but when I came to this neighborhood I sent it back a ways. I feared we should either slay some of the children; or some of the adults would slay us. So I journeyed hither with as much humility as possible, and was prepared to claim the privileges of a settlement-worker, had I been molested."

"You're the genuine heroine, you are. I knew that you would come if I made it a test of courage."

"Well, now that I am here, what is the important business?"

"I want to know why it is that I have missed you the last three times."

"Father has a very strong prejudice against you. I never told you about it; but he saw you the last time that I did. He asked me who you were the next morning and I told him. We had quite a scene. He has not actually forbidden my seeing you because he knows that that would make me want to; but he has made it a point to monopolize the evenings on which you were to call."

"I knew he was prejudiced and I humored him in it. The young should always do this. Of course we know better, but we should always act as if it were impossible for our elders to make a mistake; but there is a limit. I am willing to see you at any time and in any place;

but I positively must see you, and he will have to adjust himself to the situation."

"Oh, Dick, don't let's talk about such things in a business office. You said in your message that you had an extremely important matter to discuss with me."

"If you can think of any matter more important than the selection of your partner for the balance of this earth-life, you now have the right to introduce the subject."

"Dick, you are perfectly incorrigible! You know that if I had thought you would talk like this, I should not have come."

Without removing his eyes from hers, Dick attempted to take her hand. Without appearing to be conscious of this, Kate managed to keep her hand free. "Well, now that you're here," said Dick tenderly, "I want you to answer me. Kate, you know that you are the only girl I ever loved—" a vigorous knock came at the door—"Get away from that door"—to Kate—"I want you to tell me—"

"You had better see who it was that knocked," said Kate nervously.

Dick stalked to the door and opened it. Ivan was trying to dismiss a young man who carried a book. "It is the bill for the ice, sir," he explained to Dick.

"You know I never pay bills at this time," said Dick angrily. "Tell him to call the first of the month."

"But this is for last month and you told him to be sure to call to-day," persisted Ivan.

"This is preposterous!" said Dick impatiently as he stepped into the outer office and closed the door after

him. "Now if you three can't put out the next boy that intrudes, why send in a riot call, but don't bother me."

Dick slammed the door after him as he hurried into his office to gaze reproachfully on Kate's laughing face. "Oh, stop laughing!" he protested. "This is the most serious thing in life."

"I know that the paying of an ice bill is a serious matter and the refusal to pay one almost equally so; but I just can't stop laughing. It is too funny."

"I didn't mean that. I mean that my proposal—"

"You might have known that a proposal in an office would be simply a burlesque."

"Then tell me when I may see you—when are you going back?"

"I am stopping at the Holland for a few days to do some shopping. Father has plans for every evening, and I think there is a very deep method in his gladness."

Dick was too intense to be diplomatic. He took her hand and said tenderly: "Won't you give me this little hand?"

"Dick, I hate to be unkind," replied Kate, her eyes dancing; "but I fear I can't even lend it. I shall have to hold up my skirt with one hand; and I fear—I do not wish to speak slightly of your chosen neighbors—but I fear I shall have to hold my nose with the other."

Dick drew himself up stiffly, but failed to inspire awe. The girl patted him softly on the cheek with her gloved hand and ran lightly from the office.

Dick stood for a moment biting his lips and then as

the tingling in his cheek began to assume the pleasant reaction of a caress instead of a slap, he rushed through the outer office and throwing the outer door wide, looked dejectedly into the vacant hall.

"Birkhead," he cried whirling toward his industrious bookkeeper, "I want you to follow that young lady and see that no one bothers her."

Emil did not look up and Dick stamped his foot, exclaiming, "What's the matter with you?"

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Emil, glancing up in surprise; "but I have only figured it down two thousand years."

"Figured what down?"

"Why the compound interest on one penny at six per—"

"Oh, let that go for a few moments and follow that young lady."

"What young lady?"

Dick drew a long breath and said calmly: "You go, Ivan. Go on with the interest, Emil. I want the result as soon as possible. How are you getting on with your article, Mr. Lorrimer?"

"I inferred that you wanted a fairly comprehensive view, and have just finished sketching an outline of the general European conditions prior to the invention of Bessemer steel. From this period I wish to lead gradually—"

"That is correct. I have no use for pastels. When you do anything for me I want a radiograph."

Dick reëntered his office and took out the photograph. He looked at it a long time, shaking his head

thoughtfully. "If I had it to do over again," he remarked at last, "I should never let her know one-fifteenth part how much I love her. Then she wouldn't be so blooming independent. But don't she head up well! Oh, she's a queen, she certainly is!"

In answer to a knock Ivan was admitted and announced, "She got into a cab, sir."

"All right," replied Dick, keeping his attention fixed on a bridge sketch under which he had thrust the photograph.

As Ivan closed the door behind him, Miss Burton entered the outer door of the office. "Where is this young Bannington person?" she demanded.

"Mr. Bannington is very busy to-day, you will have to—"

"Now, that will do. Announce Miss Burton."

Ivan did not approve of women, especially those who came into contact with Dick; but there was an assurance about Miss Burton which forbade delay.

Most of Ivan's moods were dog-like; he was faithful to an extreme, but in performing a repugnant service he made it perfectly clear that it was contrary to the dictates of his own conscience, and that his own conscience was absolutely reliable. He walked slowly to the door and gave three knocks with long intervals between. This was a signal that the visitor was of small importance; but Dick was not paying attention and said, "Come in."

Ivan came up close to Dick and whispered, "Miss Burton."

Instantly Dick sprang from his chair and hurried to

the door, radiant with joy. "Kate!" he cried as he opened it.

"No, it is not Kate," said Miss Burton coldly. After entering, she folded her arms and waited until Ivan had withdrawn; "and furthermore, the name of the young lady to whom you have just referred is Katherine."

Dick reached forth his hands, crossing them en route, took one of Miss Burton's in each of his and before she was fully aware of it was shaking them heartily. "Well, I'm sure I'm just as glad to see you," he said. "This is your first visit here. Take a seat."

"And it will be my last," answered Miss Burton, striving to overcome the softening effect which he always had on her. "This neighborhood is frightful. I can't see why you chose it."

"Bless you, I didn't choose it. It developed its present state without help of mine—in fact was here before I was, so that I can not claim any credit for it; but it is so quaint and picturesque, you know, that really I find it most interesting. Civilization in the rough, man in the making, as it were. Won't you be seated? There's a Chinese laundry in the next building and I'll send out for some tea. They always have it ready-made, you know. This is a comfortable chair—there, that's better."

"Thank you. No, certainly not. I should never think of drinking tea made in a laundry! Why, the odors in these streets are enough—"

"Great, aren't they?" interrupted Dick, beaming with pride. "I have a pipe here which is pretty good along

that line. Perhaps you would like to have me run it a while?"

"I do wish you would," said Miss Burton, fanning herself. "It will be most refreshing after those villainous streets."

"I'm glad you like the streets—they made a great hit with me, too. I don't care for anything that is timid and diffident. I like a thing to be strong and self-reliant and positive. Now, the perfumes of this neighborhood do not attempt to deceive you, they reach forth and grab you by the nose and shout their message clearly and distinctly. Of course one can not approve of them entirely; but there is something winsome in their very heartiness."

"Winsome!" repeated Miss Burton, laughing. "Dick, you always disarm me with your nonsense; but I came here to scold you severely, and I intend to do it."

"Oh, fiddle," scoffed Dick; "let's not waste this delicious tête-à-tête by rude and crushing invective. Let's just have one of our sociable chats, and then after you have gone you can either write me the scolding, or telephone it to central. They always need one. Don't you think this a swell little office—after you get here?"

"You certainly do look prosperous—but Dick Bannington, I am not going to allow you to wheedle me this time. This is a very serious matter."

"My dear Aunt Emma—you know you told me once to call you that; I think it was to prevent my falling in love with you—while I admit that the condition of the streets is a very serious matter, I think that your

attitude is unjust. I am not the street commissioner. His office—”

“I am not referring to the streets; but to your enticing my silly niece into such a neighborhood.”

“I have to see her, some way or another. You know that,” asserted Dick.

“I know that you have made my life a burden the last three months. I have tried to do my duty; but you always manage to circumvent me by artifice or pure brazen effrontery.”

“Yes, I perfectly agree with you,” assented Dick gravely. “When Fate seems to select two young people and make of them a perfect match, it is generally useless to attempt to spoil the union—father or no father.”

“Fathers have their rights, too. And you are so flighty and impulsive that I do not approve your being alone with a young girl.”

“I know it and I tried to spare you worry. Kate should not have told you; but you never came to any harm through being alone with me.” Dick smiled reminiscently. “Do you remember the very first night I came to see you and we walked in the moonlight—walked? we raced, and when we came to the swing, I swang you—swang does not sound just right—”

“It is swung,” said Miss Burton, laughing softly. “Oh, but that really was fun!” Miss Burton paused and sobered. “But I have no doubt it was terribly silly; and then I am not a young girl.”

“Then I am blind on the inside. Why, your heart is so young that you still believe in fairies. And what’s a gray hair more or less, but a certificate from old banker

Time showing a good year to your credit. Wrinkles and gray are only tendrils of ivy on the outer wall; but as long as the heart is young, youth still holds the castle."

"Ah, Dick—Dick; it would take more than wrinkles and gray hair to keep you out of a woman's heart." She paused, dropped her eyes to the carpet, and resumed in a low tone, "I had my own love story once. Perhaps that is why I have not been more strict with Katherine. He was just such a careless, eager young fellow as you are—and they did not understand him, they thought him bad and wild just because he had high spirits. I yielded to the wishes of my family, and he went away and, and—but after all, it was easier for him than for me."

Dick could not see her eyes, but from the burning tightness above his own, he knew just how they felt, and he cleared his throat, knowing no way to express his sympathy.

"But this is all nonsense," said Miss Burton, shrugging her shoulders. "I came here to scold you, and I intend to do it. It was very, very wrong of you to ask her to come here; and you must never do it again."

"I'm afraid you're right," said Dick sadly, and then added hopefully: "but you'll come again some time, won't you?"

"Much you care about me, you broker of blarney," said Miss Burton rising. "But you are a dear good boy after all, and I truly wish you well; and I don't believe that Kate could do better than to take you."

"And you'll help us, won't you?"

Miss Burton shook her head. "I'm afraid I shall," she confessed.

"Then I wouldn't care if she had seven fathers!" cried Dick, taking both her hands, swinging them wide apart, and giving her an unexpected kiss.

For a moment Miss Burton strove to look indignant, and then she smiled and gave Dick a box on the ear. "I really must hurry or I shall be late for luncheon," she said, starting toward the door.

"Why not take luncheon with me?" asked Dick, opening the door.

"I should never dare without a chaperone," replied Miss Burton as she passed through the outer office. As Dick opened the door for her, she looked caressingly into his eyes—will the scientists ever be able to classify the great variety of wonderful rays which dart from eye to eye? "Good-by, you bad boy," she said softly.

"And good-by, you dear lady," answered Dick.

He returned to his private office and it seemed filled with a sweet perfume and a stimulating warmth. "She is one of the elect!" he said fervently.

CHAPTER XXIX

VICTORY IN SIGHT

DICK sat in his chair a few moments and then touched the bell. "Ivan," he said sternly, as soon as his satellite presented himself, "never let any one else present a bill to me."

"He has been here many times. We still need ice. I am sure—"

"Do not bother me with explanations. Next time if there is any money in the drawer pay him; if not, get rid of him. That is simple enough. That is all."

Ivan had scarcely taken his perch on the stool next to the telephone booth, before Claude Lorrain entered. He looked superciliously at the three clerks. Emil had not noticed his entrance, Lorrimer had and now held his head close to his manuscript, Ivan returned the gaze with cold disdain.

"Is Dick in?" asked Lorrain.

"If you will kindly give me your card," replied Ivan distantly, "I shall take it in to Mr. Bannington."

"Oh, my soul, Ivan, you make an admirable lackey!"

Ivan made no response, but started to sort the pile of bills as though no stranger were present.

"Are you going to announce me?" demanded Lorrain.

"What name?" asked Ivan.

"This nonsense has gone far enough. Announce me."

"I have my duties to attend to. If you wish to see Mr. Bannington, you must give me your name."

Lorrain scowled and clenched his fist. "Announce Mr. Lorrain," he said angrily.

Ivan announced him and Dick in some surprise admitted him. Lorrain showed signs of recent dissipation and Dick was surprised to note a wave of fierce resentment rising in his own breast.

"Allow me to congratulate you on the excellent discipline of your staff," said Lorrain.

"Thanks," said Dick stiffly. "I haven't seen much of you lately."

"No, I had a lucky streak a while back, and since then I have been playing at business, the same as yourself."

"Not much play about mine. Where is your office?"

"I have not opened an office. I merely buy and sell through my broker."

"Margins?"

"Yes."

"That's not business—merely sport."

"I found it profitable as long as Burton and I were in touch; but he was too overbearing, and so I cut him out. Now I have some holdings which are getting touched up and I want you to advance me a little to cover."

"You know exactly how I am fixed, Lorrain. I really am not in a position to lend you ten dollars."

Lorrain glanced at the rich furnishings. "I can't help but think that you are bluffing," he said skeptically. "There is so much of it done in this uncivilized country. It is partially your fault, too. I bought Bannington stock for a rally and it is still going down."

Lorrain could not well have chosen a keener method of irritating Dick, and his black eyes danced as he saw the effect of his thrust. "I am sorry; but I can not help it," said Dick with sincere simplicity.

"Well, I'll look a little further," said Lorrain lightly. "You certainly have pleasant offices here. I congratulate you on cutting out that socialism nonsense and going back to your own class."

"I do not consider it nonsense now any more than I ever did. It is my circumstances, not my principles which have changed."

"Always the bluff, always the bluff," laughed Lorrain. "You Americans seem to think the rest of us are as crude as yourselves; but my personal experience is that the principles keep close step with the circumstance. It is no use, Richard; universal equality is all very well for the riff-raff—like you have in the outer office—but for men of birth, bah!"

Dick picked up some papers and glanced at them: "You must excuse me, Lorrain, but I am extremely busy," he said in an even tone.

"Certainly," answered Lorrain as he arranged his coat collar. "Well, good-by, old chap. Better luck soon."

He strolled into the outer office, paused in its center, lighted a cigarette, spun the match contemptuously,

toward the three clerks who had not looked up and walked jauntily into the hall, leaving the door open behind him.

"I do not believe in bombs," remarked Ivan as he descended from his stool to close the door, "but if that man should hold one in his hand until it went off, I should say that the bomb had acted in a perfectly justifiable manner."

Just as Ivan reached the door, a short, plump man with quick, energetic movements, entered. "I want to see some nut-locks," he said promptly.

Ivan stared at him. "Nut-locks?" he repeated.

"Certainly," answered the new-comer. "Isn't this the Dickie Nut-lock Company?"

"Yes, sir," replied Ivan politely as he began to apprehend that the man was a genuine customer. "What business are you in, sir?"

"Smith Pump Company, Syracuse—manufacture fanning mills, incubators, extension ladders, and all forms of novelties," answered the man.

"Have you a card?"

"I certainly have—here it is."

"I shall take it in to the president," said Ivan. "Just take a seat."

Dick read the card with keen interest. "I believe it is a real customer, Ivan," he said. "Business is picking up." He took his perfecto from its resting-place, lighted it, bunched the papers in front of him and said: "Admit the gentleman, Ivan."

Dick waited until his visitor had time to inspect the room, then laid down the paper he was examining, and

said cordially: "How do you do, Mr. Smith? What can I do for you?"

"I see you are busy, and I'll get right down to business," said the genuine customer in a strictly business-like tone. "I use a heap of bolts in the course of a year and I have lots of bother from nuts coming off, sometimes get caught in cogs and things, and I have to repair free. I want you to make me a price on nut-locks."

Acting on general orders, Ivan had taken the "Genuine Customer Formula" into the telephone booth with him, and at this juncture he rang the telephone on Dick's desk.

"Hello," said Dick. "Yes. No, they are not on the market just at present." He turned to his customer: "I shall keep your card and communicate with you as soon as we catch up with back orders"—again the telephone—"I have prepared plans for that bridge already—No, a cantilever in this position is much better—I am too busy to see you to-day—next Wednesday morning."

Dick took a book from his desk and entered the appointment. At the same moment, Mr. Burton entered the outer office slammed the door after him and said, "Can I see Mr. Bannington at once?"

"He is engaged at present," answered Ivan. "I shall announce you as soon as he dismisses his present client. Take a seat, please."

Burton was excited; he dropped into a chair, glanced at the three clerks, rose to his feet and continued to fret and fume.

Mr. Smith had not slighted the broken conversation

which he had overheard, and as Dick noted that it had increased his respect, he felt very well pleased at his foresight in making ample preparations. "I am very sorry, Mr. Smith; but just at present my plant is running night and day on a big government contract and I can not fill any outside orders; but I shall enter your name as a favored customer and supply you as soon as possible."

"Now, I'm a man who wants to do a thing the moment I get the idea, and I'd be willing to pay a bonus to get a few thousand as an experiment."

Dick smiled blandly. "I am sure," he said patronizingly, "that I have refused a larger bonus this very day than you could afford. I treat all alike. First come, first served. The amount of the order is immaterial."

"I've got some stiff competition and I want to beat 'em to it," argued Smith.

"Well, you have. I shall have your name entered and you are the first in your line to make application. Most of my customers are among the large contractors—who also have stiff competition."

"I suppose that settles it. Well, don't forget that I am in the market as soon as you can deliver. Good morning."

"Good morning," said Dick as his departing customer held the door open. "You shall have the nutlocks as soon as they are manufactured."

Mr. Burton did not wait to be announced. He seized the door of the private office while Smith was still holding it ajar, and as soon as Smith started across the outer, he entered the inner office, his face flushed

with anger. Dick was examining a blue-print and a note-book. He did not look up.

"Who was that man?" demanded Mr. Burton.

Dick looked at his visitor in well simulated surprise, took a calm draw at the perfecto and said: "I had forgotten that you were announced. Have you been waiting long?"

"I was not announced. Yes, I've been waiting entirely too long. Who was that man?"

"That was one of my customers," replied Dick politely. "Won't you be seated?"

"How does it come that he can get nut-locks, if I can't?"

By this time Ivan had selected the proper formula and seated himself in the booth. Before Dick could answer, Ivan rang him up.

"No," said Dick, in answer to Ivan's question, "just keep on with those coat-hangers for the present. The regular force is sufficient on nut-locks for a time"—to Burton—"I have explained all this in my letters, Mr. Burton."

"Your letters explain nothing," answered Burton angrily. "They are an outrage. I have asked you—" the telephone intruded with careless insistence.

Dick leisurely placed the receiver to his ear: "Hello. Oh, yes. Now it will take at least a million barrels of cement to build that reservoir—I refuse to assume any responsibility unless I have complete control"—consults date book—"I can see you at ten A. M., a week from to-day." Dick hung up the receiver and turning to Burton as though nothing had broken their conver-

sation, said: "I think that my letters covered everything."

"They did not give me the slightest satisfaction," replied Burton, irritated beyond the diplomatic stage. "You are simply seeking to take advantage of me by a trick; but this is"—bzzzzng called the telephone—"Damn that telephone!"

"I have sent an engineer down to look over the location, and will make an estimate as soon as I get his report," telephoned Dick.

"Now this is the situation," said Burton, controlling himself with an effort. "My bid was the lowest, but your uncle had specified this fool nut-lock. My bid was accepted provided I use the Dickie lock. On the night we took dinner together at"—bzzzzzzng! Mr. Burton clenched his fists and stamped.

"Don't bother me with such trivial details," said Dick impatiently. "Always reinforce cement at such a place.—Pray proceed, Mr. Burton."

"Well, you appeared very anxious to have your lock receive recognition, and seemed perfectly willing to do your part. You agreed to furnish the locks at an advance of ten cents a hundred over ordinary taps, and I—"

"My dear sir, this is all in writing. Our contract covers everything."

"That contract is a perfect farce! You—" As the bell again interrupted, Burton sank into a chair and leaned his head back wearily.

"Buy forty thousand—buy in forty thousand lots until the market advances ten points, then sell; but buy

and sell through different firms and be careful.—Let's see, you were saying?"

"I want to ask you if you and your uncle are together in this?"

"And I am forced to remind you that your question is out of order," replied Dick with dignity.

"The contract says that you are to furnish nut-locks as fast as they can be manufactured. You have only furnished a few hundred and it will take centuries to finish at this rate."

"The contract says that I shall furnish nut-locks as rapidly as my plant can manufacture them, running night and day," corrected Dick.

"Then let me make them. I can do it in a week."

"Oh, no; you would turn them out rough and raw, while the product of my plant is really a work of art."

"Art, hell! I want nut-locks. What kind of a plant have you?"

"I have one old man working days, and another working nights. They really turn out beautiful work. Would you like to see the plant—it is right in this building?"

"You think that you can balk me with such a game as this?" shouted Burton, rising to his feet and glaring at Dick. "I'll show you! Now that I know that you're nothing but a trickster, I'll give you a taste of the law. Your uncle is back of this deal; but I'll smash it like an egg; and as far as your suit for my daughter's hand is concerned"—again the bell rang.

To the surprise of Burton, Dick seized the receiver and yelled: "Stop this confounded ringing, I am

busy." Ivan was as much surprised as Mr. Burton, as a large part of the formula was still in reserve.

Dick dashed off a note ordering Ivan to go forth and purchase fish for their next meal, touched the bell, and when Ivan appeared, said: "Take this note to the vice-president, please," and as soon as Ivan had vanished into the closet, turned to Mr. Burton and said with steely suavity: "You started to say something about your daughter's hand, I believe."

"Well her hand is nothing to you," answered Burton, who had had time to see the impropriety of his remark. "I was prejudiced against you because of your uncle, I despised you for being a silly, unpractical, college-bred theorist, and now I hate you for your trickery. I would sooner see her—"

"You had better not say it," interrupted Dick quietly but in a tense voice. "When a man loses his head, he is very likely to lose his cause also. I was not consulted in the selection of uncles. Before we're through with this fight, you'll have more modern ideas as to my unpractical theories. And as for your daughter, I shall win her, if I can, through love—but hanged if I'd accept her as a bribe."

Things were down to a personal equation now, and Dick was perfectly at home. As he looked into Mr. Burton's eyes, that gentleman suddenly took on a surprising resemblance to Tufty Sheldon. Like a flash, his memorable combat and victory over Tufty came back to him and he smiled inwardly at the favorable augury. Burton was at a disadvantage; he preferred to be entirely removed from the personal, the clashing.

It was far better to sit calmly in his inner sanctum, decide on the plan, and leave its execution to men whose welfare depended on their success.

"You, you, you!" he choked, and came to a full stop. "You conceited puppy, you! I'll have you singing another tune within a week."

He slammed the door and rushed through the outer office, while a wicked grin stole over Dick's face. He looked at the perfecto, which was pretty well finished by this time. "No," he said with decision, "my nerves need the rest of you right this minute, and they have rights the same as other folks;" saying which Dick thrust the cigar into his mouth and took a deep refreshing puff.

A few moments later, Ivan was admitted bearing a fish in one hand and an extra in the other. "Don't bring fish into my private office, Mr. Michaelowski," said Dick in a tone of astonishment which immediately brought a blush of repentance to Ivan's eyes.

"Look at the extra, sir," he offered by way of apology and explanation.

"Thank you," said Dick gently. "Ivan, I doubt if we have time for a regular meal this noon—I don't care for anything. Just fix some sandwiches for the rest of you, and—I think that's all."

As soon as Ivan had left, Dick scanned the extra with nervous eagerness. "This is it," he muttered—"Market on verge of collapse, Bannington Steel Plant down to thirty-eight, National Steel Mills also weakening, nothing but a prompt rally can prevent the greatest crash in years!"

He folded the paper carefully and laid it on his desk, after which he drew a curved finger across his brow. "Keep your seats, gentlemen; Dickie still has his mitt on the steering wheel. They forced me to it," he resumed after a moment's pause. "I was perfectly willing to devote my young life to suffering humanity in the mass; but, with their usual goatly manners, the honey-boy class could not refrain from butting in. Now, simple duty compels me to spank them all soundly and put them to bed. I wish it were over, I wish it were over. I feel as though there were forty thousand in the grandstand and the ball and eleven padded vandals sailing straight toward me. I wouldn't trade places with any one else in the world—but, it's a terrible journey away down to that goal line—and I wish it were over. I wonder if fitting a fellow for such a strain as this isn't what foot-ball is really for. It's a good bet."

He rang the bell twice, waited and again rang it twice. At the third signal, Ivan shook Emil to consciousness and sent him into the private office, still in the daze of concentration, a closely filled page in his hand.

"I beg your pardon, sir; but I have only the interest figured down three thousand years. The further on it is carried, the larger it becomes."

"Just like an Indian baby," interjected Dick. "But what I wanted to ask you was—what day in what week of what year is this?"

Emil stared a moment until his brain adjusted itself

to the new focus. "This is Tuesday, the fifteenth of October, nineteen hundred and—"

"Was it this very morning that I heard you pining because the hours clanked by in dreary monotony, while you yearned for something to happen?"

"Yes sir ; you see my mind—"

"You are positive that it was this very morning?"

"Yes, sir ; in matters of date, never do I—"

Dick suddenly changed his expression to one of mock seriousness, and said fiercely: "Well, if I ever hear of your complaining of dullness again, I shall provide the coroner with a valid excuse for gazing into your placid countenance. Now get back to your perch and hustle on with that interest. The market is in a turmoil, and nothing can settle it except the information on which you are at present working."

Emil gazed thankfully into Dick's face for a moment, and replied: "Then I shall destroy also what I have already done. If everything would go to smash, so much quicker would the revolution come."

"You wouldn't say that in an argument," said Dick, smiling. "You know in your heart that it is not the Cancērs of Industry on whom the changes of social evolution depend ; but the proletariat itself. That's all."

"You are right," admitted Emil, "my mind was with other matters occupied."

"I merely want that item to use in an address," said Dick.

"Then I shall shorten my method and finish with great speed," said Emil.

As the door closed behind Emil, Dick placed his feet on his desk and sighed. "They have helped me a lot," he said. "They have furnished me with loyal comradeship, and also with much innocent amusement; but I can now see what my uncle meant by the loneliness of business. It is as though I were shut away in the heart of a battle-ship, directing the action without actually seeing the ships which opposed me or the effect of my own shots. I want things to be in the open—everything! The wars of modern business are fought with disappearing guns, smokeless powder, submarines, and mines. When a flag is run to the peak, it is never the flag of your enemy and everything seems lovely until you are blown up or rammed. I want to fight in the open, and before I start in to fight, I want to send around a card stating my intentions. Hang it, we're not as sporty as those jovial old iron-clad fanatics of knight errantry—but they would stand about as much show against us as a regiment of land turtles. I wish something else would happen. I am beginning to notice an impulse impelling me to open that window and shriek."

CHAPTER XXX

CROWDED AT THE TURN

DICK was not forced to endure a long suspense. He had hardly expressed a desire for something to happen, before the outer door was thrown open and his uncle entered. Richard Bannington stopped, looked at the row of clerks, recognized Lorrimer, and gave a grunt of contempt.

Ivan climbed down from his stool, came up to him, and said respectfully: "Good morning, Mr. Bannington; is there something I can do for you?"

"I hope I don't look like a man who would be loafing around in search of a time-killer at this hour of the day," answered the old man curtly. "Where's that—where's Mr. Bannington?"

"I shall announce you."

Dick's face lighted at the announcement, and he did not stand on ceremony, but hurried into the outer office, his hand extended cordially. "Step right in, Uncle. Glad to see you," he shouted.

The uncle did not see the extended hand, neither did his own face take on an answering light. He followed his nephew into the private office; but refused to take a seat. For a moment he glared at Dick without speaking, and then in a low, cutting tone, said: "Of all the

low-grade sneaks, you leave the slimiest trail that ever crossed mine."

Dick's face instantly hardened. "I have not the slightest idea what you are after; but you are taking the worst possible course to get it."

"After! After! I'd see my hand wither and fall off before I'd hold it out to you for a postage stamp."

Dick chose the light armor of supercilious assurance for the fray. "Then to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?"

"I did not know how black you really were until after I had come here. I thought you only a headstrong fool—I find that you are a crafty, sneaking villain."

"I am totally unaware of the circumstance which caused your change of opinion; but I infer—"

"Don't lie to me, don't lie to me! I can see everything, now."

"Allow me to congratulate you. I am truly envious."

"Listen," said Bannington, holding up his clenched hand and speaking with deliberate bitterness, "if I could blast you with a word, if I could crush you with a curse—I'd do it. Yes, and I'd laugh while I was doing it."

"I congratulate myself now," replied Dick without hesitation. "If you could do all those vocal stunts, I'd get out an injunction and have you muzzled. Really, Uncle, I haven't the faintest conception of what you are driving at. It sounds like rather classy melodrama; but I'd enjoy it more if I knew what it meant."

"You do know what it means, you scoundrel! You have ruined the Bannington Steel Plant—the business

your own father started with the little fortune your own mother brought him—the plant which I have given up my best years to make stanch and honorable, and which I hold dearer than friends or health, or life itself!”

“But not dearer than your own vanity—as long as we are making comparisons,” added Dick dryly. “The plant is failing because you used up its surplus in your personal fight with Burton. The very reason which prompted you to hamper yourself by not watering the stock, was the knowledge that unless you took mighty good care to make profits, the stock-holders would never stand for the childish wastefulness of such a fight, and you would be thrown into the hands of a receiver.”

“Much you know about it! I’ve been able to branch out in every direction without taking a single risk, until this last depression. Burton has the most ready capital just at this time, but he’s sliding, too. Mark my words, he’s more frightened than I am, because his organization is looser. No matter what happens, it’s your fault, all your fault—you scoundrel!”

“You’re a great one to squeal!” said Dick in exasperation. “For years you have gloated over swallowing smaller enterprises than your own, and now that the gaff is thrown into you, you howl like a Dervish and scurry around hysterically calling decent people scoundrels. Why don’t you act like a man?”

“If it were thrown by an enemy, I shouldn’t bat an eye,” answered Richard Bannington. “But when it is

thrown by my own nephew, by the boy I trained to fight at my side, by the one of all others—”

“Oh, cut out this emotional stuff! When I left your home three months ago, you said that I did not have sense enough to make my own living and that in two weeks I should come whining back to you for a crust of bread. Has my whining disturbed the peace of your neighborhood much?”

“I didn’t know you then—I thought you were honest. Now I find that you have sold your own flesh and blood for gold, have dragged my name and your father’s memory through the mud of treachery and the slime of dishonor, have used the income your own mother left you to ruin the—”

“Stop, stop! I don’t know where on earth you picked up this sort of talk; but my system won’t stand much more of it. I demand an explanation, and if it is possible for you to use modern business phrases, it will place me under obligations to you.”

“I shall tell you, and it is the last word with you I ever want to have. I shall make an assignment before the week is out, and then hide my head for the few remaining days of my life. You know exactly what I am going to say—you have it written in red across your black heart.”

Dick writhed in disgust. “Why don’t you read it aloud then? I hope to the Lord it is written in commonplace English!”

“I hardly know what words I am using,” said the old man with half a groan, “but I know exactly what I want to say. You took advantage of information which

I gave you in trust. You alone knew how shaky the old plant was, and you alone could have stabbed it in the back, after it had nursed you all these years."

"How?"

"How! Why, by bribing my private secretary to tell the exact amount of the bids, by enticing me into putting your fool nut-locks into them, and then by conspiring with my worst enemy and my most trusted employee to crush me utterly. That's how!"

"Good God, Uncle! You are raving. I have not betrayed you, I have not—"

"Don't lie to me! I'm not so big a fool now as I was three months ago. Didn't I find out Lorrimer's treachery this very morning, didn't I fire him, and didn't he walk over here as fast as his legs could carry him and get a job, didn't he—didn't he, I say?"

Dick was dazed as he saw how things looked from his uncle's standpoint. "Yes—yes, I see how it appears," he answered, lowering his voice, "but even if it is true that he sold out, wouldn't you want him where you could put your hand on him if you could find enough proof for conviction?"

Richard Bannington looked at his nephew contemptuously, and said slowly, "You cold-blooded scorpion, you; do you think you can sting me again? I'm not guessing at this, one of your near and dear fellow socialists gave me a tip; and strange as it may seem, a tip was all I needed."

Dick thought silently for a moment, and then said gently: "I can see exactly how it looks to you; but, Uncle, I swear it is all a mistake. There has been no

conspiracy. I have played alone, absolutely alone—and the game's not played out yet."

"That's it, brag over your devilment. I don't see why the graves don't open and the dead rise up to revenge themselves!"

"I can't tell you the finish yet, Uncle," said Dick soothingly, "because I don't know it myself; but I ask you not to do anything rash and not to say anything more that will be hard to swallow when we come to make up. I am in no game with Lorrimer, I am in no game with Burton, I am—"

"You are an infernal liar, that's what you are! Didn't I see Burton coming away from here as I came in? Didn't I have to bite my lips and turn away to keep from springing on him and killing him with my bare hands? And isn't Lorrimer working at your desk this very minute?" He paused, raised his hand solemnly, and said: "That's all, that's all—except I hope that when you are as old as I am, your own children—"

"Don't put evil thoughts in the minds of the children, Uncle," interrupted Dick who felt no bitterness toward the old man. "Just try to keep calm until to-morrow, and don't—"

"To-morrow? There will never be a to-morrow for you and me—you viper!" He shook his fist at Dick, opened the door, slammed it after him, stamped through the outer office, head up and eyes to the front, slammed that door after him, and then began to feel that perhaps, after all, he had made a fool of himself.

"Good Lord, what next?" sighed Dick. "I feel like Samson after he had made his last touch-down!"

Dick put his hands into his pockets and walked to the window as Miss Burton entered the outer office, her face showing signs of nervous excitement.

"Is that Dick Bannington alone?" she asked.

Ivan nodded mechanically and started to dismount; but she did not wait. With eyes flashing and lips set, she opened the door of the private office, slammed it behind her and demanded: "What have you done now?"

Poor Dick was also irritated. "I haven't had a chance to do anything this morning, but hang on to my head while a different variety of idiot tried to jerk it off. What do you want?"

"Don't you dare use such a tone as this with me! I have just left Katherine, and she has just left her father; and he says that you have ruined him, and she has gone to the Holland to pack up and go home. She says that she hates you, and after all I have done for you both, I don't intend to stand aside and see my entire plan spoiled; so you will have—"

"My dear Miss Burton," cried Dick, holding up his hands in despair, "you will have to run that record through again. I missed half of it."

"What do you mean by ruining her father just at this time? If you had to ruin him, why couldn't you have waited until after—"

"This is purely a matter of business. Whenever I am impelled to ruin a man I do it when circumstances are right, not any old time it happens to be convenient."

"But why do you wish to ruin people?"

"I don't want to ruin people; they forced it them-

selves. I wanted to devote myself to the lowly, to lead a simple, wholesome life, but they wouldn't stand for it, they had to poke and prod and abuse me until I lost patience. Now, they must weather the storm the best way they can."

Miss Burton seated herself and examined Dick critically. "I am sure you are a great disappointment to every one, but I suppose you get it honestly. I just met your uncle on the stairs, and he nearly glowered a hole through me. I was honestly afraid he was going to bite me. Well, I have done all I can. You have no one to blame but yourself."

"But you can't stop," expostulated Dick, "I shan't allow it. I need you more now than ever, and I positively insist that you hurry to Kate and make her change her mind."

"See here," rejoined Miss Burton sharply, "you seem to forget that you are nothing but a boy. You may have discovered some way to ruin Burton, and cause a panic, but you'll not find it so easy to order me about—and forty times harder to change Kate's mind."

"Well, I'm honestly sorry for having spoken so abruptly," said Dick insiduously, "but you know that you are my best, and almost my only ally. Won't you please go and tell Kate that she must not be too hasty? I'll tell her all about it as soon as I can."

Miss Burton's face softened. "I am convinced that under Kate's influence, you would soon outgrow your recklessness, and I shall do what I can, but I fear it won't be much." She rose and put a hand on Dick's shoulder. "Dick, don't ruin any one else. When you

get as old as I am, you will discover that it is much better to give one man a start than to ruin a dozen. Now, be good."

"I can't stand this pace much longer," said Dick wearily, after Miss Burton had gone. "I ache all over."

After a moment's inaction, he decided to call Kate on the wire. It required much fuss and patience to get the right number, and then he was disappointed to find that she was not in, but on the promise of a five-pound box of chocolates, the girl at the Holland exchange promised to call him as soon as she could get her on the wire. "I suppose telephone girls are good for the soul, but they're blamed heroic treatment," he muttered as he hung up the receiver. Dick had arrived at the stage where the nerves begin to fuse.

A knock came at his door. "Come in," he called drearily.

"Mr. Burton wishes to see you, sir," said Ivan, evincing a suppressed excitement. Ivan was still clinging to the hope that in some occult way, socialism was to result from his employer's peculiar campaign. "I think he is ready to give up," he whispered mysteriously.

"There's an epidemic of it," responded Dick. "Show him in."

"How do you do, Mr. Burton? I suppose you have called to tell me what the law can do to me."

It was an entirely new Mr. Burton. His face was gray and haggard, as faces which are habitually kept to a set expression of calm assurance become when a fierce strain has broken down the nerves which held

them. "There is no use beating about the bush," he answered. "I knew exactly what the law could do when I left. I can put the screws to you, all right, but it would take too long and you have as much money to fight as I have. There is not much in this blamed contract at the best, but I suppose I shall have to give you some kind of bonus even to let me get out. What is it you want?"

"I am truly sorry that you did not talk this way earlier. I might have settled at a much lower figure a few days ago. I am not a bluffer, and you made a mistake to treat me as one. Now, you must answer some questions."

"I am ready to answer fair ones, but I tell you right at the start that as far as my daughter is concerned—"

"Your daughter is not concerned," interrupted Dick sharply. "You had better take note of the shape of my eyebrows, and the way my jaw is hung." Dick paused and the elder man, without feeling any disposition to smile, examined the strong, determined features to which his attention had been called. It brought him into still closer touch with the personal equation which he instinctively dreaded. Taking a man's position away from him is taking away his armor. At no age of the world's history did its heroes desire to go naked into the arena and challenge humanity to produce a foeman worthy of their ribs. A foeman worthy of their steel was the desired article, when steel was the fashion. Now that the battle is likely to be legal, it is still more comfortable, for those who can afford it.

"I am not depending on chance," resumed Dick, as soon as Mr. Burton's expression suited him. "I am not depending on kindness, I am not depending on a girl's intercession. I have blocked out a plan of my own, and what is more, I am in a position to carry out this plan. I know what your bond is; I know what your time limitation is; I know what your capacity is; and I know what your resources are. What I want to know now is, are you back of the bear movement which is battering B. S. P.?"

"Good Lord, no—National Mills is going down with it."

"Very good. Now, then, from whom did you get your knowledge of my uncle's bid?"

"I can't answer that. I absolutely refuse."

Dick raised his eyebrows and smiled. "When you feel like talking, call in again," he said, whirling his chair until he faced his desk, and speaking lightly over his shoulder. "I am not under bond, you know; I can afford to wait. In the meantime, my two-man plant is running night and day."

"I am willing to do all in reason," said Mr. Burton, as Dick picked up a blue-print, "but you must admit —" Bzzzzing.

Dick took down the receiver. "Hello, who is this — Oh, good!—Now, I have something of the utmost importance, genuine importance this time, and I must see you at once."

Mr. Burton could not tell that it was his own daughter to whom Dick was speaking, but he could tell that

the gladness in Dick's face was not assumed and it filled him with an increased anxiety.

"No, I can't tell you now—I really can't, I'll explain as soon as I get the chance—No, don't hang up—Oh, hang it!"

"What difference does it make who I got it from?" vouchsafed Mr. Burton, whose presence Dick had forgotten. "I paid twenty thousand for it, and that ought to satisfy you."

"It helps," admitted Dick calmly. "I am merely testing you. I know from whom you got it."

"Who?"

"If I name him, will you admit it?"

"Yes."

"You got it from Claude Lorrain," said Dick.

"Yes."

Dick grinned. "Did it ever occur to you that this man came over with me, and in all probability is still in my employ?"

Burton lost his self-control. He sprang to his feet, his fingers hooked as though they would clutch Dick's throat. "You low-lived, treacherous, sneaking—"

"Never mind," said Dick gently, holding up his hand. "I have heard all these terms once before to-day, and I am not partial to them at the best."

"I see it all now," said Burton through set teeth. "I have suspected it all along, and now it is as plain as a headlight. You are merely the cat's-paw in the hand of your uncle, but as long as you are going to resort to—"

"Come, come—we are business men; let's talk in a

business way. And before you make any threats, remember that you are a briber. You are making all the fuss and losing your temper, but my advice would be to remain cool, so that there won't be any unpleasant mud-puddles to jump across on your way back. We shall probably retrace this road soon."

"Well, what is your proposition?" asked Mr. Burton recovering himself.

"What is the most you can make out of this deal?"

"There's mighty little in it. It's a small contract, the Bannington bid was rock-bottom and I had to *go* thirty thousand less, taking the—"

"Don't bother to make out a case," said Dick. "I know some of the other contracts which hinge on this one, and what it really means to you. What I want to know is, what will you make out of this one contract?"

"I suppose we'll make about three hundred thousand," answered Burton sullenly.

"That's better. You ought to be a little more careful, Mr. Burton. I'm liable to lose my patience at any moment and squeeze you down to the gravy. Now, then, if you have to forfeit your bond at this time, you become that instant a full-blown down-and-outer and I can make you slip the forfeit."

"Well, what is your proposition? Good Lord, man, it is getting late and things are all in a mess!"

"My things are in very good order. What is the cause of the enmity between yourself and my uncle?"

"I refuse to answer," said Burton, springing to his feet and speaking with finality. "That is a purely personal question."

"You are right," admitted Dick. "Then, from a business standpoint, you would be willing to merge with the Bannington Steel Mills. Maybe not openly, but at least—"

"Oh course I should," broke in Burton heartily. "I'm not a fool. Big as we both are, we have rammed our heads together until we are both likely to be swept into the scrap-heap at the same time. If you were at the head of the Bannington Plant, though, it would be a heap easier. I'll own up that your conduct to-day has opened my eyes to a lot of facts. I hate to say it, but I'm losing my grip, the game is outgrowing me—it takes young blood to fight. If it were you instead of your uncle, I'd say merge to-morrow, and you be president of the new concern, and, furthermore, I'd be willing to have you for a son of my own."

"Well, thank you all around. Now you just step out for fifteen minutes and find out how things are going over on 'Change. This day is about all in, and I have a lot of 'phoning to do, myself. Before you return, call me up by wire and I'll see if I'm ready for you."

Burton paused at the door and looked back. Dick had spoken with a shade more reserve than he liked. "I am able to take my medicine, Bannington," he said a little diffidently, "but you have hinted at hope. You won't turn me down, will you?"

"I play to win. I stack the cards when it is necessary, but I am not the enemy of any single man—least of all, you. Still you have to get out of this scrape through my door."

As soon as Burton had withdrawn, Dick called up the Holland, told the exchange girl that she had won the chocolates, and requested her to put Kate on the wire again as soon as possible. When she informed him after a short delay that Miss Burton had again left the hotel, Dick slowly hung up the receiver and stared resentfully at it for a moment. Then with a sigh, he called his uncle. At first that gentleman was frigid, but in the end he promised to hasten to Dick's office as promptly as possible.

"I feel as though a jig-saw were running in the back of my head," said Dick, clasping that article and leaning his elbows on the desk.

All the different scenes of the morning crowded about him until he scarcely knew whether he was waking or dreaming. The threads of so many different fates were held in his grasp that they seemed a hopeless tangle, and for the first time he began to doubt his ability to manipulate them. For breakfast he had only had sufficient courage to eat two of Ivan's leathery flap-jacks, and he had eaten nothing since.

"I haven't size enough," he muttered with honest pessimism. "My plan was all right, but I'm too much of a light-weight to carry it out."

His arms sank to a heap on the desk, his head rested on them, and for a space the active mind was as a motor from which the current has been turned.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STRUGGLE FOR THE WHEEL

THE door to the outer office opened, and Kate entered, her face flushed from the haste in which she had come and the mingled emotions which beset her.

"Is Mr. Bannington unengaged?" she asked.

Ivan nodded, but having grown accustomed to having his sacred office treated with disdain, made only a feeble pretense of dismounting from his stool.

Kate crossed the office hurriedly and knocked. Dick aroused himself with an effort and was at first tempted to escape through the closet, but the few moments of absolute relaxation had given him new force and he straightened in his chair, and called: "Come in."

Kate entered and closed the door behind her. "Why did you wish to see me?" she said with reserve.

"Because I'm dog tired and you are the most refreshing sight in all the—"

"Please stop. Under the circumstances I consider your flippancy to be a direct insult. You have deliberately determined to ruin my father—he told me so less than an hour ago, and it is killing him. I did not come here to listen to flattery. I came to see—to see—Why did you wish to see me? Tell me the truth."

"I am not your father's enemy," answered Dick sincerely. "He is not ruined yet, and if he is, it will be through his own obstinacy."

The girl looked at him proudly, for a moment the expression wavered toward anger, and then it settled to wistful disappointment. "This is what I feared," she said in a voice which refused to be quite steady. "Oh, Dick, Dick, I trusted you so—I thought you so chivalrous and noble under your careless manner. Dick, I did love and respect you, but I never can again."

"But I'm not responsible for your father's obstinacy," exclaimed Dick in amazement.

"I think you understand what I mean. It is the smallness of your nature, the craftiness, the—"

"Go right ahead," encouraged Dick, "say just as mean things as you can think up if it will be the slightest relief to you. My spirit is bruised to a navy blue, so that if you wish to unload any little gobs of hatred—I'm that entire department. You started out by saying, 'This is what I feared.' What is that you feared?"

The girl hesitated. "Make it as plain as you can," begged Dick, "and if you can draw a picture to illustrate it, that will help a lot. My brain was only a lump of chalk to begin with, and this day's business has started it to crumbling."

"I am ashamed to put it into words."

"I'm too weak to do any mind-reading. I reckon you'll have to say it."

Kate turned her face away from him. "I hate even to think it," she said in a low tone, "but I am sure that

you have made my hand the price of my father's ambition. Dick, you have broken my heart!"

Dick had risen as soon as he had observed his visitor's identity, but when she had joined the others in attacking him, he had seated himself defiantly. Now he rose and took her face very slowly and very gently between his hands. Turning it toward his own, he gazed into it a long moment and said very soberly: "Kate, I should be glad to have you disappointed in me, if I were such a cad, but, thank Heaven, I am not. I have not thought of your hand in this deal—not for a moment. I am willing to work for you all my life, but if you could be bought—no matter at what price—Kate, I couldn't love you then."

Her face turned rosy beneath his gaze, and her hands stole upward and pressed his hands. "And you will not ruin my father?" she asked.

"Your father must protect himself," replied Dick firmly, as he gently withdrew his hands. "I did not bargain with him for you; you must not use your love to save him. Love is love, and we must keep it pure, no matter how loudly the dollars howl as I drive them into the open."

Kate backed away from him slowly. "Then, I must leave you. I do not think that I could ever trust you again. Dick, you frighten me—and I never was afraid of you before." She paused at the door and then hurried back to him. "But oh, Dick," she said feelingly, "for the sake of all that has passed between us, do not be too hard on my father."

"Your father must play his own hand alone," said

Dick solemnly, and the girl closed the door without replying.

Dick took a few strides, and as a new light came into his face, he paused and exclaimed: "She is afraid of me—she said it herself! This morning I felt like a picture-nail when she looked at me. Great Scott, what a day this has been!"

A moment later when Richard Bannington presented himself, he merely questioned Ivan with his eyes and hurried into the private office. "Well? What now?" he demanded.

"Uncle, you said this morning that you would be willing to make almost any sacrifice to save the plant. Burton is willing to merge, or if you prefer, a mutual understanding which will not affect your apparent independence, can be arranged. It all depends on your vanity."

"Dick, I'm all in," admitted the old man brokenly. "This morning, I could have killed you, but after I left it came over me that after all you were my nephew. I can't hate you steadily, Dick. I work up as good a hate as any one could, but it won't stick. You've been meaner than dirt, and I know it's my duty to hate you, but way down deep in my heart the old love I had for you is still fooling around, and it spoils everything." The old man paused, swallowed, and then said fiercely: "And that shows whether or not I'm vain, you infernal scamp!"

"That's the ticket. Now, will you be white all the way through, and merge with Burton? That was your original scheme, you know."

"No, I'll not merge with Burton," said Bannington with a decisive gesture. "Hang Burton! I don't love Burton. Did he propose it to you?"

"He did."

"Then, he is hard hit, himself!" cried the old man, striking his palm with his fist. "The market rallied a few points just before I came over. I can make another plunge and wipe him off the slate. His raft won't stand a storm like the old Bannington Plant, which is built like a ship. Dick, it's not too late yet, come in with me and we'll stand on Burton's neck and shake hands."

"It sounds inviting, Uncle, but I have to decline. The fact of the matter is, that I have both you and Burton in the same fix. I can wipe you both off the slate, but I don't want to."

"Is that straight, Dick—you are not in with Burton, but are fighting him as well as me?" The weariness which had cloaked the old man when he entered, had fallen from him, and his keen eyes were shining with old-time vigor.

"I am not in with Burton," answered Dick quietly, "but I am fighting no one. I have simply tied one rope to Burton's neck and your waist, and another rope to your neck and Burton's waist. Now, all I need is to give you each a jab, and you will jerk off each other's heads."

The old man looked at his nephew for a moment. "Say, Dick," he asked in a quizzical voice, "who the devil are you, anyway—Mephistopheles?"

"There is nothing remarkable in what I have done,"

replied Dick with becoming modesty. "Business is only a game. The great trouble with most young fellows is that they get the shivers at the size of the stakes, and buck-fever at the noble bluffs their elders put up. You remember that marble game I invented when I was a kid? Well, I'm just playing it over, only I'm stringing the two biggest steel plants in the country instead of Jim Haskel and Buddy Sanderson."

"You've hit the nail on the head, boy. It is only a game, but it is cruel hard when it sets against you. I've lost my grip, and when you lose your grip—just for a moment—you're done for. Dick, will you take over the plant and run it?"

"No, I don't want to do that, Uncle. I merely wanted to force you and Burton into a merger, and start a little business of my own which would bring in an income of twenty or thirty thousand a year—without too much bother—but I did not have the slightest desire to swing a tremendous thing like the merger would be."

"*Did* not have—how about it now?" asked Bannington eagerly.

Dick stood in the center of his office, feet planted firmly, head and shoulders thrown back, hands clenched at his side, and his eyes flashing. "Oh, Uncle, it's great!" he said enthusiastically. "To think of all the mighty forces a man can focus on one point and fairly melt it, or focus on another and weld it; to feel the concentrated strength of thousands center in one's shoulders and wait calmly for the bidding of one's brain! Oh, Uncle, it's more fun than a speckled pig!"

The old man's heavy hand came down on his nephew's shoulder with a resounding slap. "You've caught it!" he cried. "That's the secret. That's why we fling youth and health and pleasure and leisure and— and sometimes more, into the furnace. It's not for the filthy dollars! Why, Dick, if I'd been paid a salary four times bigger than my income, you couldn't have hired me to do the work I have done. That's where your socialism myth goes to smash! A man, a real man, don't want to burrow like a worm in the ground, he wants to fight for the biggest thing he can see and when he wins it, he wants to call it his own.

"We don't want the safe thing, the easy thing. We want the hard road and plenty of opposition. We're a different breed, boy; we're the same strain that marched to the crusades, that sailed the unknown seas, that tore the wilderness from the grasp of the savage, and turned it into a garden. We're a tough proposition to combat, Dick, but those who follow after can lie down and sleep with their doors unlocked. Why, hang it, boy, now that I see that you have gumption enough to be practical, I don't mind sitting up until three o'clock every morning, talking theories with you."

As the old man's fervor increased, Dick began to cool. "You still look at everything from your side," he said quietly. "If you love opposition and hard roads, why do you stifle competition and establish monopoly at the first opportunity? It is true that you are industrial pioneers, and as such are entitled to respect, but you are not entitled to the privilege of

taxing all succeeding generations. As you say, business is only a game—you fellows do all the playing and the great mass who produce actual wealth do all the paying.”

“Don’t sink back to that stuff, Dick,” said the old man testily. “There are plenty of idle fellows to wrangle about socialism, but you have your own work cut out. The laboring man doesn’t care a hang about socialism, so why should you. I am perfectly willing to let the preachers and the lawyers and the doctors and the writers be socialists. It will never amount to anything until the millions who work at day wages take it up and they don’t bother their heads about it. You come in with me and live your own life.”

“Listen, Uncle; I am convinced that the trust idea is essential to social evolution, and that the sooner it is applied to all industries, the sooner will come the great age of freedom. That is why I encourage it; none of my views has changed. Will you, or will you not merge with Burton?”

“I wish Burton were in Ballyhack!” exclaimed the old man angrily. “I want to fight him, I want you to help fight him, I want to wipe his name out of the directory—I hate him. No, I won’t merge.”

“Then you go and beat your head against the wall a while longer,” cried Dick with answering anger. “You scheme for a merger, you pick out a wife for me, you turn me adrift, I agree to marry the girl of your choice, I find a merger and bring it to you on a silver platter, you own up that you are whipped, and yet you won’t merge. Oh, you are too obstinate to

reason with. If you don't want chickens, what do you set hens' eggs for?"

The controversy had stimulated Bannington's circulation, and he now felt as fit as ever. "You young whipper-snapper," he shouted, shaking his finger in Dick's face, "you can't talk to me this way. You think I'm whipped? I'm not. Ten minutes ago I feared I might be, but I never was before, and I'm not now. You think that you can boss me around and ram Burton down my throat? Bah! I'll cut you out of it entirely and hammer Burton until he comes to the scratch. Do you want to know how? I'll tell you how. You gave me the right to make your fool nut-locks for this contract. I'll make 'em, I'll sell 'em to Burton for half his profits for the next year, and by the time that you wake up out of your dream, you'll look like a bubble that's been hit by a comet."

The old man gave his head a toss and stamped out of the office, leaving Dick holding his chin in his hand, and looking weakly at the carpet. He stood thus for several minutes his forehead wrinkling.

"It looks to me," he said slowly, "as though I had forgotten that there was a joker in this deck."

CHAPTER XXXII

AN EXPLOSION

THERE used to be a game, or rather a pastime, called "bat-ball." It was played with a large rubber ball, board bats, and by as many boys as the community could furnish and the locality accommodate. The object was to keep the ball in the air, and whichever boy was responsible for allowing it to descend to earth was relegated to the side lines. As there was no umpire, there was considerable discussion among the players—but the ball, who really had the chief cause for complaint, was too busy and too dazed to utter a single word of protest. Dick was now in a position to sympathize with the ball.

While he was still trying to understand how it had happened that his hand was jerked from the steering wheel, and that he now found himself clinging desperately to the rear axle, he perceived Miss Burton closing the door behind her and advancing toward him menacingly.

"Now, you've done it," she remarked with heavy and direct accusation.

"I suppose so," admitted Dick, his mind still occupied with the clever manner in which his uncle had slid the high card from his sleeve and taken all the tricks

in sight. "I can't quite see how to get control of the lead again, but I'll figure it out after a while."

"She is in an awful condition," said Miss Burton, who sometimes availed herself of the feminine prerogative of totally ignoring another's remarks, and continuing the line of her own argument, unweakened by the influence of sentiments in opposition. "She has got to that stage where she respects you, and that is generally fatal to love."

"What are you talking about?" asked Dick, trying to fix his attention on what Miss Burton was saying.

"Naturally, I am talking about Kate," replied Miss Burton with dignified sarcasm. "What are you thinking about? But no matter. Of course I came with her through these wretched streets, and waited in a drug-store—some way, drug-stores always seem respectable no matter where you find them. Well, when she came back, she was in one of those ethereal moods where a woman says that she can never love again, but will always respect, and treasure the memory, and all that sort of talk. Now, this is all nonsense—a woman can always love again. It's her nature to love; she begins by loving a doll, and ends by loving an ideal—both rather unsatisfactory makeshifts—but in the meantime she loves real live men, until she finds them out. You have been dilly-dallying and shilly-shallying with her until she thinks that you are a namby-pamby. Now, I know that you are not a namby-pamby"—Dick shook his head with sober sincerity—"but she doesn't. You must be firm with her, you must not let her do all the talking. You talk fast enough with other people, but

with her you just sit and listen, as though what she said was really worth while. Don't interrupt me, I can only stay a second. Assert yourself, you always do with other people. I have generally found you to be overbearing. I can't stay another second, she is waiting at the drug-store until I get back. I had to invent an idiotic excuse, all for your sake. I am going back to her now, and I am going to bring her here by some hook or crook. When she comes, you be your natural self—and there is more brute than angel in that, I'll warrant. Make her do whatever you wish, and whatever she does not wish, and that will make her love you again. This is your last chance—I haven't time to listen to a word—don't you dare to fail me."

As the door closed, Dick sank heavily into his desk chair. "I wonder if some one really was in here, or whether I am beginning to see things?" he asked himself doubtfully, but her suggestions began to interest him, and soon his mind was fully occupied with his love affair and the possible effect of following Miss Burton's advice. His mind was so fully occupied in fact, that a few moments later, when Mr. Burton entered, Dick looked at him in unaffected surprise.

"I have been thinking it over," said Burton briskly, "and I find that it will be impossible for me to merge with your uncle—we have been enemies too long."

Mr. Richard Bannington had entered the outer office, had been stopped by Ivan, and now just as Dick stumbled over an attempt to invent a remark which would impress Burton, Ivan knocked on the door.

"Come in," called Dick in relief.

Ivan entered, closed the door, and said, "Mr. Richard Bannington, sir."

Burton rushed over to the door marked "Vice-President," and which opened into the closet. "This is a put-up job," he said angrily, as he opened the door a few inches and turned to face Dick, "but I refuse to meet him. I shall just step into this room, I suppose it opens into—"

"Don't go in there," cried Dick, running over to the door, slamming it, and standing in front of it. "The vice-president has not had any lunch yet, and it always makes him surly to miss his lunch."

Mr. Burton was outraged. "I must say, Mr. Bannington," he snapped, "that this firm has the most unusual officials I have ever heard of."

"I know it, I know it," admitted Dick, "but just take a seat. Ivan, tell my uncle that I shall see him in a few minutes. Now, then, Mr. Burton, I am ready to listen to the reasons which prompted your change of base."

When Richard Bannington received the news that his nephew was conferring with the president of the National Steel Mills, he whirled on his heel and stalked out of the office, his face twisted into a scowl.

"I have found a way to get around our contract," said Mr. Burton confidently. "I admit it is liable to cause a little delay and may probably cost me a lot of money in the end, but it will cinch this present government deal, put Bannington Mills out of business, and end your career with a smash."

"Must be rather a clever scheme," was Dick's dry

comment. He knew that much of Burton's confidence was assumed, and resolved to meet bluff with bluff. That peculiar condition known in the vernacular as "second wind" had come to him, as often in his football career, it had come in time to change defeat into victory. He looked Burton calmly between the eyes. "Well," he resumed, "I have done the best I could for both of you. My uncle also refuses to merge. The trust idea is the only possible one under present conditions. I was perfectly willing to extend your tenures of office, but if you deliberately refuse, it is on your heads that the responsibility must rest. You know in your heart, Mr. Burton, that the off-shoots of your central business will hamper you as much in retreat as they benefited you in advance. This is also true, although in a less degree, with Bannington holdings. You have perhaps noticed that the market has rallied a little lately. I intended it to close with an upward trend, but if nothing but war will satisfy you, why, war it is."

Dick rose to his feet, his own words having produced auto-intoxication, and the long delayed reaction having given him full command of his nerves. As he looked smilingly into Burton's eyes, they both more than half believed that his words were conservative and final. "I have all my plans made," he said evenly, "and unless I send forth the word to switch them, the bottom will start to fall out of the market a few minutes before closing time and to-morrow you will be fleeing from the wrath of the mob."

Again it was personal contact which rested heavily

on Mr. Burton. He found himself looking into the confident face of a fighting man, a powerful man, a young man, and the old habit of a thousand ages still ran in his blood—the habit of defending oneself from physical danger, by means of one's own physical force. Oftener than we are aware, these old, primitive habits which lurk in the blood, secure from the attacks of reason, leap forth and grip us at the most inopportune moments.

"I can't tell what to do," said Mr. Burton peevishly. "I don't see why you can't—I'll walk around a bit, and think it over."

"Better make up your mind one way or the other. I am strongly tempted to lock up and go to the country until it's all over."

"I'll be back in a few minutes," said Burton, as he left the office.

"Wouldn't we just love to know what cards the others are hiding?" said Dick. "I now know exactly how Mr. N. Bonaparte felt about four P. M. on the day of his justly celebrated game at Waterloo. I wish it were over."

Ivan knocked and was admitted. "Mr. Claude Lorrain is here, and he has been drinking," he announced. "Shall I tell him to call week after next?"

"No," replied Dick grimly, "admit him. I have been abused all day without having a chance to strike back; it will be a relief to abuse some one else."

Lorrain entered with his usual assurance. Nothing but a certain sheen to the eyes indicated that he had been drinking. "I'm all in, Dick," he said without

embarrassment. "I've been on the wrong side of every move and I'm stone broke. What can you do for me?"

Dick looked at him coldly. "I can send you up for five years, if I want to," he replied with harsh distinctness, "but I don't want to. All I want is to tell you that you are a contemptible scoundrel, and to advise you to leave this country as soon as possible."

"Is that all?" asked Lorrain with a sneer. "Well, when I want advice, I'll let you know. What I want now is money. You promised all kinds of things to get me over here, now you pretend—"

"Cut it out," interrupted Dick sternly. "It did not require an anasthetic to tear you away from your beloved country, and you had been here before, anyway, and knew the conditions. Emil and Ivan will soon be provided with funds to carry out their plans, or with positions which will make them independent—whichever they prefer—but as for you, you are a sneak, a thief, a low-grade, treacherous scoundrel."

It was a luxury to lay a biting emphasis on each epithet.

"You're a liar!" cried Lorrain.

Dick smiled threateningly, as he stood with his muscles at feline readiness. "Thanks," he said heartily. "I have been called that before, to-day, but was not able properly to resent it. We are about the same size and age. I shall have to ask you to take it back, at once, or, or I'll punch your head off—you thief!"

As soon as Lorrain had entered the private office, Lorrimer had got down from the stool and had placed

his ear at the key-hole. Ivan had indignantly pulled him away, but Lorrimer had explained that he was Lorrain's brother and that Lorrain was desperate enough for anything.

Lorrain had turned white with rage when Dick had ordered him to take back the term, and when Dick had taken a step forward and called him a thief, he had sprung back and placed his hand to his hip pocket.

At this moment the door opened and Lorrimer entered. The three men stood in strained positions for a moment, and then Dick said with cool hauteur: "Mr. Lorrimer, you seem to have forgotten my instructions. No one is allowed to enter this office without my permission. That is all."

Lorrimer looked at his brother, at Dick, but receiving no notice from either, withdrew and closed the door.

"Lorrain," said Dick, advancing toward him, "I am going to do you the undeserved honor of whipping you in the good old American style."

Dick's fists were doubled into large, hard lumps, and in his eyes was the gleam of combat. Lorrain backed toward the door marked "Vice-President," drew a revolver and pointed it at Dick.

"Put that thing up," ordered Dick. "Now, understand the conditions perfectly; in my desk I have a gun and a hidden police call, in the outer office are two men who would die for me, but I want a fight, a real fight. I need it, and I insist that you put up that gun."

Lorrain laughed contemptuously, and there was not a trace of fear in his laughter. "I shall not put up the

gun," he said. "I hate you. You must not think that because I condescended to live with ruffians for a while, that I shall also brawl with them. You are nothing but a bully. I have nothing to win or lose in life, now, and before I leave it, I am going to get even with you."

"Not yet," answered Dick with a peculiar smile. "I still have one friend that money can't bribe, smooth words can't wheedle, or a revolver frighten." He paused, looked at Lorrain a second through half-closed eyes, and then called in a loud, clear voice: "Take him, Mulligan, take him!"

A movement in the corner at Lorrain's right caused him to shift his eyes in that direction, just as the vice-president of the Dickie Nut-Lock Company, came forth from beneath the table, his eyes red with determination, the bristles erect along his back, and his teeth gleaming fiercely. Just as the dog leaped for his throat, Lorrain whirled and fired point blank. Mulligan fell in a heap to the floor and Dick at the same instant sprang across the intervening distance, seized the smoking revolver in his left hand, and Lorrain's throat in his right.

With a powerful twist he wrenched the revolver free, cast it to the rug, doubled up his fist and struck Lorrain in the center of his forehead. The blow rendered him unconscious, but Dick was beside himself, and held him erect by the throat while he continued to beat him with his left hand.

"You have killed him, you have killed him!" he screamed, almost raving. "I'll have your life for this.

He was worth a dozen such curs as you! You coward, you sneak—"

Ivan and Lorrimer had reached him by this time, but Dick in his rage was a match for all three of them and when they grasped his arms, he loosened his hold on Lorrain and shook them from him as though they had been children.

Lorrain sank in a heap, and after a glance at him, Dick knelt beside the still body of the dog. "Poor little fellow," he said brokenly, "right in the center of the forehead!"

Dick no longer felt any of the restraints of civilization; he turned to the fallen man as if to tear him asunder, but was stopped by Lorrimer's upraised hand and quiet words: "Please don't, sir. I fear you have gone too far already."

Lorrimer was kneeling beside Lorrain, and something in his face and manner awakened Dick's slumbering decency, and he rose to his feet.

"Here is the bullet in the edge of the table," said Ivan, who had been making an examination.

Dick instantly looked at the embedded piece of lead, ran his hand over Mulligan's bony skull, which had been designed for the strenuous uses of an active and venturesome career, and exclaimed: "His skull is not broken, the bullet glanced. He's only stunned! I'll take him to the drug-store."

Dick, all forgetful of the industrial chaos which he had helped to produce, picked up the bulldog and rushed into the outer office, where Emil's busy pencil was still rapidly following the fate of the increasingly

prosperous penny. "Emil," he called, "telephone a doctor to come to Fenton's drug-store. Bullet wound."

For the thorough study of philosophy and economics amid scenes of turmoil and violence, it is necessary to cultivate abnormal powers of concentration. Emil slowly raised his head and explained: "I have only figured it to the fifth thousand years, at every year it larger grows and by now—"

"What shall we do with Lorrain?" inquired Ivan, who had followed.

"I don't care," answered Dick shortly. "Throw him in the garbage barrel if you want to. Clean up the office, tell all callers that I'll be back in a few minutes—and send that doctor to Fenton's."

Dick slammed the door after him, and Emil climbed down from his stool and wandered curiously into the private office. "Why, there must a fight have been," he said in surprise. "No wonder it was hard my attention to hold to my work. I am going to have a private room in the future. Why, it is Lorrain!"

Lorrimer had thrown water in his brother's face, and now Lorrain began to moan and writhe.

"What had we better do with him?" asked Ivan.

"I shall take him away," replied Lorrimer. "No matter what else he is, he is still my brother. Tell Mr. Bannington that I shall return as soon as possible."

With Ivan's assistance, Lorrimer helped Lorrain to his feet and after he had walked him about for a few moments, he put his arm around his waist and supported him from the office.

"Help me straighten this office," said Ivan.

"Tell me, how did it happen?" asked Emil.

As Ivan talked he worked busily and in a few moments the office was set to rights and the two in charge had taken their places behind the wire screen in the outer office.

Emil arranged his loose pages methodically, sharpened his pencil, and set down a formidable row of figures. Suddenly he raised his head, and pointing his index finger slightly above Ivan's head, he said solemnly: "Ivan, I am convinced that affairs in this office are beginning to draw to a climax."

"I wish that they were settled," rejoined Ivan with a sigh, "so that we could give all our attention to the affairs of the Cause."

CHAPTER XXXIII

AT THE WHEEL OF THE SUPER-CAR

IT was probably five minutes later that the unusual calm was broken by the entrance of Richard Bannington. His step was alert and his face was eager. "Where is Mr. Bannington?" he asked.

"He was called out on important business, but said that he would return as soon as possible. Won't you take a seat?"

"I'll take a seat in his office. Tell him I want to see him as soon as he returns."

The old man shut the door after him and seated himself in a comfortable rocking-chair. "I wonder what's up, now," he muttered. "Burton wasn't hooked the last time he saw him, and he's not the man to grab a thing without a good look at it. He was studying about things, though," he added thoughtfully. "Burton's beginning to look old. Well, we've had a good long fight. I must say I rather respect the man."

He sat with his back to the door, drumming on the arm of his chair, as Kate Burton entered the outer office. "Is Mr. Bannington in?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am, in the private—"

Kate swept through the outer office and into the inner one, closing the door after her. "Oh, I beg your

pardon," she said on catching sight of Richard. "I thought Mr. Bannington was here."

The old man looked at her with fatherly approval. Her face was troubled, but her eyes were brighter than ever. "He is here—but I suppose you mean my nephew," said the uncle kindly. "He will return in a few moments; take a seat. It is probable that he will wait on you first."

"And so you are his uncle," said Kate, looking at him with frank curiosity, "but I should have guessed it, anyway."

"And pray, who are you?" asked Bannington, his eyes twinkling.

"Why, I"—Kate paused in embarrassment—"I am Kate Burton."

"Humph; any relation to William Steel Mills?"

"His daughter," replied Kate proudly, and then watched her inquisitor keenly, expecting to see him fly into a rage.

Bannington stared at her a moment. "Then, who was the other party?" he asked.

"What other party?" asked Kate in surprise.

"Why, the old one," answered Bannington, chuckling. "The one I arrested for trespass and who nearly drove me out of the house."

"Why, that is Aunt Emma," answered Kate, laughing at the memory of that wonderful night. "Not really my aunt, you know, father's cousin—but she has been a mother to me."

"Have you a blue ribbon?"

"Not here, what do you want with it?"

"I'm the biggest fool this country has produced, and I want to be decorated," said Bannington, his eyes twinkling again. "But, anyway," he said, rising and extending his hand, "allow me to welcome you into the family."

"I am not coming into the family," replied Kate, blushing furiously.

"What!"

"No, that is all broken off."

He fixed his keen eyes on her sharply: "Then, what do you mean by coming to his office alone?" he asked bluntly.

"You are just like Dick!" cried Kate, blushing again. "You are just as mean as you can be. I had to come here—on business."

"What kind of business?"

"You have no right to ask."

"Did you love him, once?" asked Bannington in an unexpectedly gentle voice.

"Yes," answered Kate in a low tone, turning her face away.

"How long ago?"

"Why—this morning."

"Did you love him very much?"

"Yes, I did—this morning."

"Then you are not over it now," said the old man sternly. "I shan't allow you to be over it. I insist that you marry my nephew and stop all this nonsense."

"You have no right to talk to me this way," cried Kate, facing him without flinching. "I can't imagine

why I stayed to listen to you, or why I answered your questions."

A strange look was on the old man's face. "Child, you are very like your mother," he said.

"Did you know my mother?" asked Kate eagerly.

Bannington paced the floor a time or two, a far-away look in his eyes. "Yes, I knew her when I was a boy and she was a little girl, out in Ohio. You are a beautiful girl—I don't want to hurt your feelings, but your mother—there never was such a girl as your mother."

"Oh, tell me of her," cried Kate, placing her hand on his arm. "No one will ever talk to me of her, and I want—you can't know how much I want to hear of her."

"I am not a poet, girl," replied Richard Bannington gruffly, "and no one else has a right to speak of your mother's girlhood."

"Well, tell me something," pleaded Kate.

The old man seated himself in the rocking-chair, and half-closed his eyes. All the harsh lines had left his face and when he spoke his voice was low and mellow. "The gladness of dawn was always shining from her eyes," he said softly, "and her cheeks were peach blossoms scattered over apple blossoms, and her voice was like that of all the song-birds melted into one. She lived in the open, as a girl should, and rode and walked and went berrying, and grew up like a flower—dainty and sweet and gentle—and—" he broke off abruptly and blew his nose with great fierceness.

Kate put her hand on his shoulder from where she stood behind his chair. Her eyes were filled with

happy tears but they did not wet her cheeks. "You said that you were not a poet," she whispered, "but I do not believe you. Oh, I am so glad that you have told me about my mother! Tell me some more, won't you please?"

"Don't ask me to tell you any more, girl," said Bannington, reaching up and taking her hand. "You have the picture of her, just as it has stayed with me, and now you can make up your own fairy tales about her."

"I want, so much, to hear more of her, and you seem to remember her so well."

"That is one great trouble with me," said the old man a little bitterly. "I can never forget. And Dick's like me, child,—that's why I want you to marry him."

"Dick is not nearly so nice as you are," protested Kate. "He has a cruel, bad heart; while you are so kind and gentle."

Bannington smiled grimly. "I suppose you must have overheard some one talking of me. That is my general reputation, is it not?"

"Well," said Kate, striving to do no one injustice, "they have not seen you as I have."

"Probably not, probably not," assented Bannington. "You are very much like your mother. What is your name?"

"Kate."

"Well, Kate, I want you to marry Dick. You and I will be allies and we'll soon bring him under discipline."

"Why do you want me to marry Dick?"

"You can't imagine how much I care for the boy,"

confided the old man. "He seems like myself over again—he is lots like what I was at his age—and I know he will never love but once. And, oh, Kate, child, it is an awful thing to love only once, and to be disappointed that once."

Kate sat on the arm of the chair and her arm stole about his neck. "Did you only love once, and were you disappointed then?" she asked.

"That's the whole story of my life," answered Bannington shortly.

"Was it your fault, or was it the girl's?" she asked.

"It started in a bit of youthful nonsense—we were both proud—and, I went away. When I came back, I had made my start in life—but it was too late. It was too late then."

"Had she forgotten you?"

"I didn't try to find out. She was engaged to be married, and I did not even see her. I never did see her again."

"And was she a pretty girl, like my mother?" asked Kate. Suddenly she sprang to her feet and looked into his eyes. "Oh—was she my mother?" she exclaimed.

The old man only bowed his head in reply.

"And then that is why you and my father have been such bitter enemies?" she asked, and then with a puzzled look, added: "But why should he be bitter against you?"

"I don't know for sure—and it is just as well that I don't."

"But you have some idea. Tell me what you think."

"It hardly seems right to stir up the past; but some-

times its lessons may help us with our own. A mutual friend told me years afterward, that after it was too late—and oh, in such a little while it becomes too late. Well, after it was too late, she discovered that after all she had really loved me. She was a good wife; and if she had lived, she would have been a good mother; but—and that is why I want you to marry Dick. You do love him, don't you?"

Kate threw her arms about the old man's neck and buried her face against his shoulder. "Oh, I do—I do," she murmured; "but I never can tell him so now."

Bannington put his arms about her tenderly and as she settled on his lap, he rocked to and fro.

"You don't have to tell him, you foolish child," he said, patting her head, "all you have to do is to give him one chance to look into your eyes. I know Dick."

While the old man continued to rock to and fro, he demonstrated his resemblance to Dick by forgetting entirely that his worldly affairs were in the breakers of a rock-bound coast; but in the meantime, William Burton had hurriedly entered the outer office.

"Is Mr. Bannington in?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied Ivan. "That is, no, not the one you wish to see. Just take a seat."

"You don't lie gracefully," rejoined Burton with suspicion. "You had better cut it out entirely until you have more experience. Who is with him?"

"Why, Miss Burton—that is, I don't—"

But Mr. Burton was already steaming toward the door to the inner office. He threw it open, saw the occupants of the room spring to their feet, without

remembering to unclasp their hands, and he came to an abrupt stop on the threshold. His eyes gleamed angrily as he fastened them on his daughter. "What are you doing in this office, and why are you holding that man's hand?" he demanded, taking a step forward.

For a moment Kate was too surprised to answer. She continued to hold the old man's hand and to lean against him for support, mental as well as physical.

A look of horror came into her father's eyes. "You don't mean that there is anything between you?" he gasped.

"Look here, Burton," said the elder Bannington, "don't be an idiot. This girl is all right, and I am old enough to be her father—and I wish to Heaven I was."

"It means, father," said Kate, recovering, "that I am going to marry Dick Bannington, and that I have just been getting acquainted with my future uncle—and I am going to love him dearly."

A sudden something caught in William Burton's throat. "And what about your old father?" he asked gently. For answer Kate threw her arms about his neck and he resumed with unaccustomed humility. "I know I am silent and reserved, and I don't wear my heart on my sleeve; but, Kate—I have always tried to be a good father to you."

"You have been, you have been," sobbed Kate.

"I have loved you with all my heart, daughter," he said, forgetting, as is not uncommon with strong characters, that they were not alone, "and I have tried, I have tried—but nothing can ever make up to you for what you have lost."

Richard Bannington had turned away and was gazing out the window, humming softly to himself and wishing that a fire-escape were within reach.

"Father, you have done all you can, and I love you with all my heart," said Kate.

"Then come," said Burton decisively, starting toward the still open door.

"But, father, I love Dick with all my heart, too; and I am beginning to love his uncle also, with all my heart."

"And that's the kind of a heart to have, too," growled Mr. Richard Bannington, turning around from the window.

"Come, Kate," said Burton stiffly, "we can talk this over better at home."

"No, we can't," cried Kate impulsively. "You are nothing but a pair of naughty boys, and you have kept up this quarrel entirely too long already. It is high time that you shake hands and make up—and that is just what you are going to do." She wilfully took their two right hands and joined them while they actually did look as sheepish and awkward as two boys under similar conditions. "Now look into each other's eyes, and smile—oh, smile more of a smile than that."

The two men looked into each other's eyes and they actually did smile. At first it was only with a great effort, but finally the smile became frank and free. "Now then," said Kate buoyantly, "I pronounce you fast friends for ever more—and let no man put asunder, what I have joined together."

"Burton," said Bannington with a hearty grip,

"we've been a couple of old fools, I hope this is the end of our nonsense. You've got the finest girl there is."

"Well, I'm ready to quit," responded Burton, returning the grip, "and I want to say, Bannington, that that nephew of yours is built on just the specifications I should draw up if I were having a son built to order."

Kate slipped an arm about each of their necks. "This is the very finest gathering I ever attended," she cried enthusiastically.

They each put an arm about her waist, and as they talked, they swayed rhythmically to and fro. It was this curious scene which met Dick's gaze as he opened the door of his outer office, bearing in his arms the convalescent Mulligan, who felt fully able to walk, but had rather enjoyed the sensation which he had caused while being borne along the street with his head bandaged.

Dick was in rather low spirits. As soon as he had found that Mulligan was not in a dangerous condition, and the excitement of the struggle had died away, his own situation descended on him heavily. Both his uncle and Mr. Burton had refused to merge, and Kate had said that all was over between them. If he was defeated in his industrial raid, he knew that all was indeed over, for he was determined to hide himself from the gaze of all who had ever known him. While he was waiting for the bandage to be adjusted, he had purchased an extra, which brought him an additional depression. It stated that the market had closed much stronger than it had opened, that Bannington and Burton had been in secret conference most of the day at an obscure office on the East Side, and this was taken to

indicate that they had been acting in unison all along and that the depression in steel stocks had been for the sole purpose of freezing out the small holders.

"This is how a rocket feels, when it starts the return trip," said Dick, with Spartan facetiousness, as he picked up a far heavier burden than his dog, and started back to his office—the office from which he had meant to rule the steel industry.

Now, as he stood in the outer office, it seemed perfectly clear that his uncle had carried out his threat, had merged with Burton and had cut him off entirely, and that Kate was assisting at their jubilee.

"We'll marry off the young folk, merge the two plants, and after that we can run things on a comfortable basis," said Burton merrily.

"Surest thing in the world," assented Richard joyfully. "Together we can control the mines, transportation, price, and output—oh, it's a great deal!"

"And we'll make that young cub of yours president of the combine. He's got the youth, and he's got the nerve."

"And now that he's had a taste," added Bannington, "you couldn't pry him loose with a crowbar. We'll start in to-morrow, bear the market a little, buy in the timid shares, let in a little more money, and then—"

"Oh, it sounds just like a fairy tale," cried Kate, hugging them joyfully.

Dick placed the vice-president on his feet, and cleared his throat. The group in the private office turned to face him at the sound, and he advanced a few steps and said solemnly: "But don't forget that as

president of the new combine, I am to dictate its policies, and that may have some effect on the fairy tale. I have not changed my principles one jot. I still believe in universal brotherhood, and I still have sympathy for suffering humanity, and I am still going to devote the balance of my life to bringing about a condition wherein poverty will be impossible and crime an indication of insanity.

"For this purpose, I shall continue to maintain these offices at ninety-six Nathan, and Ivan and Emil will have the chance they have waited for so long."

Dick had spoken in firm, ringing tones, and when he stopped he started toward Kate, who had suddenly been overcome with an attack of exceeding great shyness, and had retreated to that corner which was shielded by a large Japanese screen. Dick followed her behind it, remembering Miss Burton's last instructions, and the two older men turned modestly and gazed out the convenient window.

"Let him talk all he wants to," whispered Bannington with a sly wink. "He'll do the right thing when the pinch comes."

"Not a doubt of it," responded Burton, returning the wink. "We all have to go through this stage; but it don't last long. One good fight with the unions will line him up for the rest of his life."

"What do you think has happened?" whispered Ivan, nudging Emil.

"Don't bother me," grunted Emil, "I have not yet figured the interest down to the sixth thousand year."

"And will you love me this way always?" whispered Kate behind the screen.

"At least, I shall never love you any less," answered Dick without the smallest trace of doubt in his voice.

Mulligan, who had again retired under the table in the corner, now rapped his tail on the floor as a token of satisfaction; but Mulligan was sound asleep and in his dreams the revolver had not exploded until after his leap had been brought to a successful issue.

THE END

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